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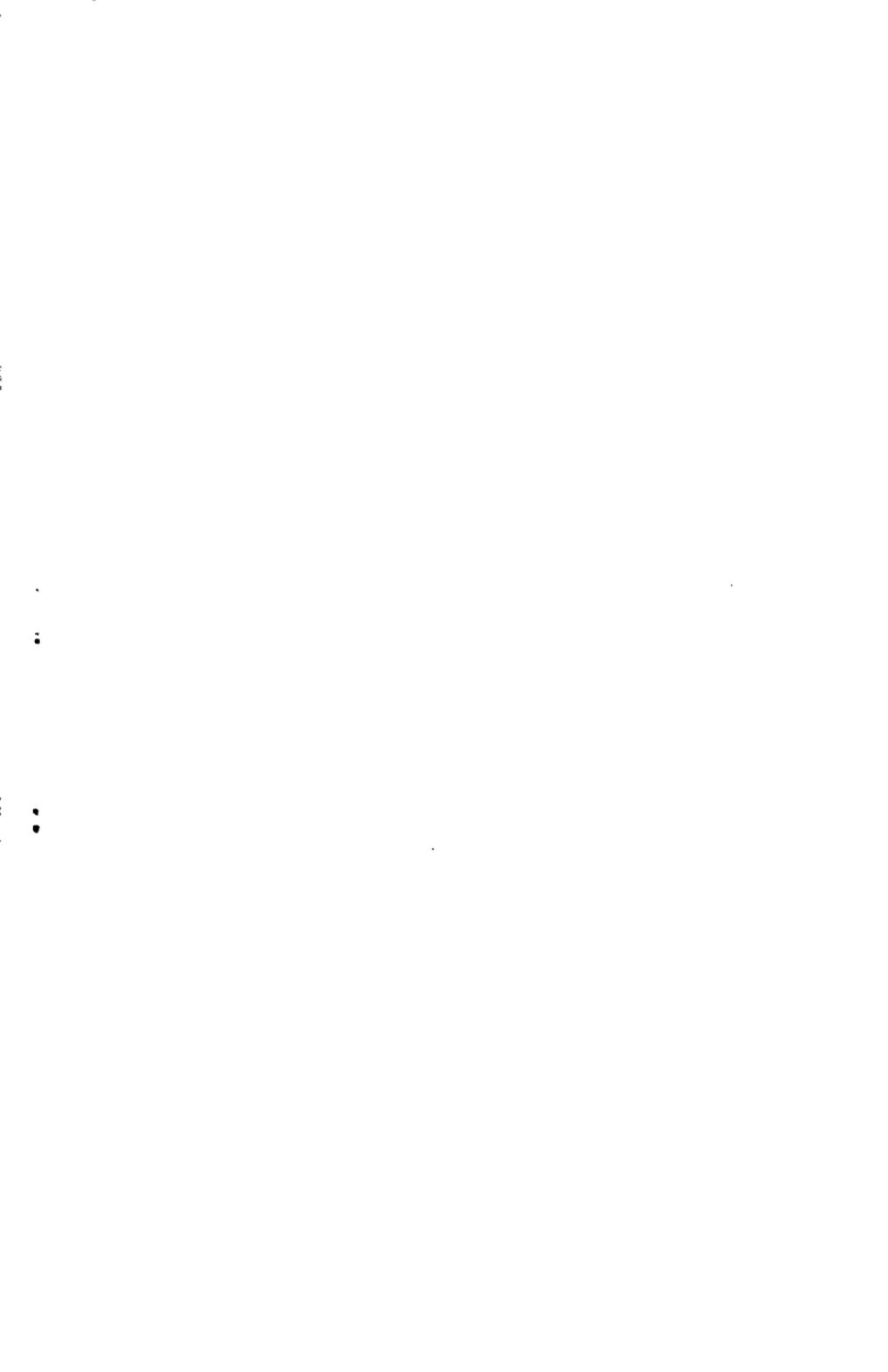
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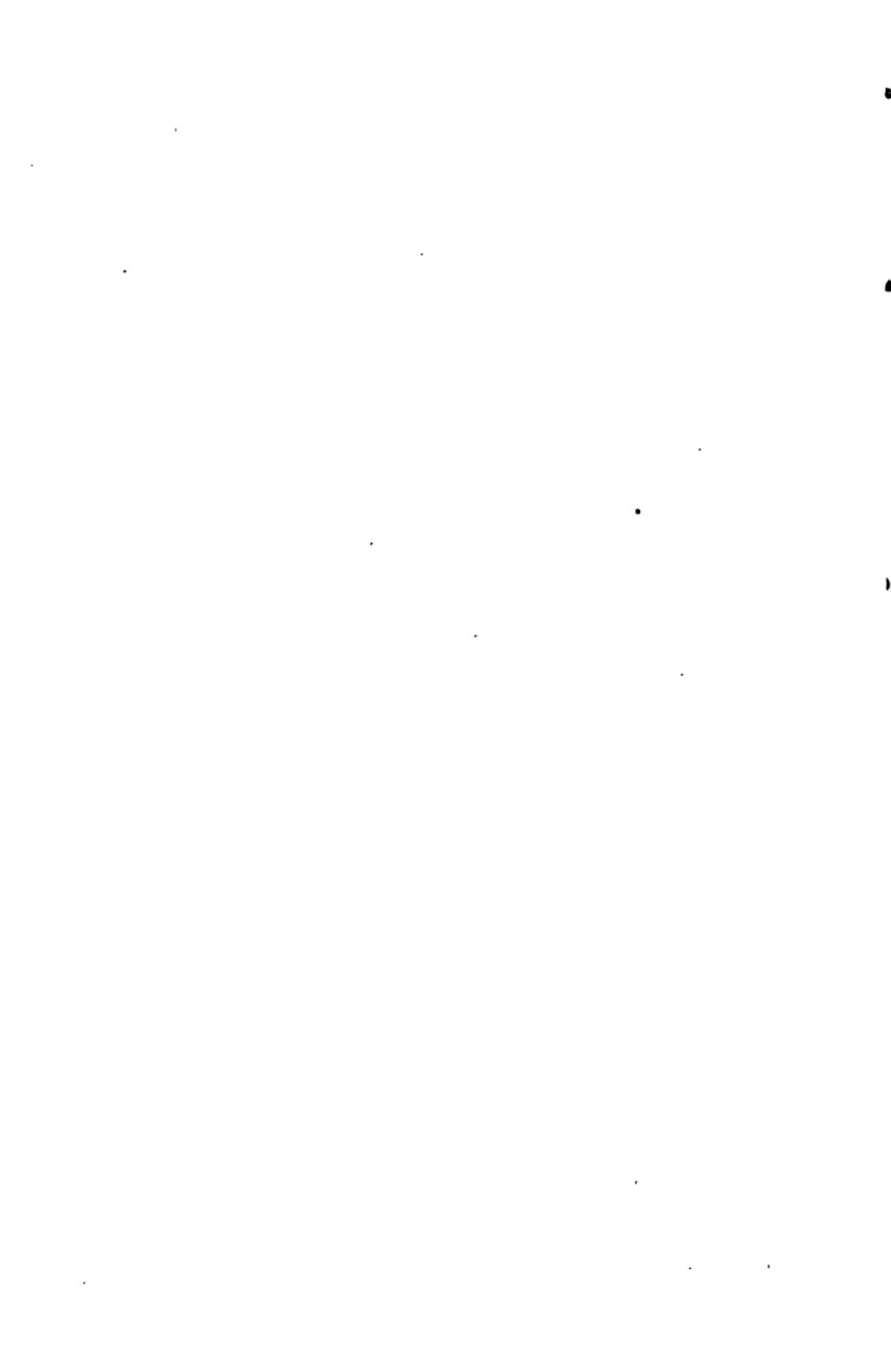
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THROUGH DUSTY CORNERS.



THROUGH DUSTY CORNERS.

A. Hobel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“CHUMS: A TALE OF THE QUEEN'S NAVY.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THROUGH DUSTY CORNERS.

Part I.

JACK NORRIS'S RECOLLECTIONS.

THROUGH DUSTY CORNERS.

CHAPTER I.

“Not dancing, Captain Norris?”

I looked up laughingly into the face of the speaker, a face bearing the stamp of honesty and happiness. Eyes clear and blue as the water lying with never a ripple over the coral reefs of a West Indian island; as the sky hanging with never a cloud over many a mile of the Equator. Eyes that could look thoughtful, lips that could close firmly, but that never did so without good reason.

“Given it up, Edith,” said I, “together with a good many other youthful luxuries!”

“Kisses in the ring and under the mistle-toe not included,” laughed Edith, as she tripped away.

She had me there. Upon a Christmas Day not long gone by, she had discovered that though verging upon the forties, there was yet in me a certain latent fondness for such pastimes.

“The mistletoe—friendly pastime!—still hangs, so beware!” cried I. But by that time she was far away, guided by Daymon’s arm, and I don’t fancy she could have heard me.

Her coming had made me think more deeply, certainly to more purpose, for in a few minutes I left my chair and went in search of her father, General Elton. I knew where to find him and soon reached the card-room fireplace, bestraddling which he stood idly, his occupation gone, for he had just “cut out.”

“Ah, General! I am fortunate,” said I. “You can spare me a few minutes?”

“Certainly, my dear fellow.” So he slowly drew his legs together, whilst I took his arm and then marched him into a small by-room, where we put to flight on our

entrance at least one pair of rightful inhabitants.

But mine too was to be a tale of love, and so befitting to the snuggery.

My tale—told plainly, for it was into an old soldier's bronzed ear that I murmured it—was, that I loved his daughter.

“When had I discovered it?” Not until I had been appointed to the *Dainty* three months before, and knew that I should have to leave her.

“Did you tell her? Does she know about it?” asked Elton.

No; I had not told her. She was very young, and I thought it would not be fair to tie her down to what would, of necessity, be a long engagement.

The General looked pleased as I told him this; she was his only daughter.

“It's a deuce of a climate, they say—that Persian Gulf; and as you couldn't take her out if you married her, perhaps we had better say nothing about it until you return.” Thus, suggestively, said the General.

Of course I had guessed how it would be. I was a fool to expect anything else. But as her father spoke, I knew that I had hoped for more.

My tale had taken some time in the telling, and the General glanced towards the door; but I would not let him go without having first heard my suggestion.

“Very well, General,” said I. “But during the next three or four years a good many men may admire Edith. Would you—could you give me your assistance, and before it is perhaps—too late, tell her that I am—fond of her?”

I stumbled over the sentence—for it seemed a good deal to ask; and I felt as bashful as a short-frocked maiden in her early teens.

Not so the General. He would have willingly promised anything rather than lose his rubber.

“I will, my dear fellow,” said he. “And what’s more,” he continued, brightening considerably as the moment of escape drew near

“what’s more, Norris, I think you’ve behaved deuced well in not putting any stupid ideas into the little girl’s head yet awhile. We shall see you to-morrow, eh?” And off trudged “Papa,” leaving me feeling like a good and faithful servant, or a harmless imbecile—I forget which.

“He’s a good old boy,” thought I; “and she—— By Gad, I can live on the mere thought of her for three years!”

I was thirty-nine, and had never really loved before.

I strolled back to the dancing-room, and in high spirits formed my portion of various “squares.” What though I could not always whisper to her laterally, I could at least squeeze her hand as we hooked in an angle, or linked in a chain!

It was enough for me—at thirty-nine years of age. At the touch of a child’s hand, every nerve thrilled, every passion awakened, and so, for the first time, I *loved*.

“To-morrow!” came the dismal thought; “to-morrow we shall part for three years or

more." But what matter? She is young; she hardly knows what love means, and I am only thirty-nine, after all. Still, I wish— And, still wishing, I wandered back towards that small by-room, with its cushions and curtains, and its air of whispered love and secrecy.

No fear that my presence might prove fatal to secluded loving disturbed me until I had reached the threshold of the sanctum; then I paused, still thinking of the separation which should commence upon the morrow.

"You and I will have three years of waiting, at least. Can you wait so long?"

My thought! But not mine alone; for the words—good heavens! the words reached me as I stood behind the curtained doorway.

I could not have moved then. I could not have turned to escape the murmured answer, had the fulfilment of every hope I held dear been the promised reward of my honourable flight.

I knew the voice that had spoken, and in

breathless suspense I awaited the words that should grant its request—grant it, I felt instinctively, in the tones I loved so well.

What chance had I against Daymon and his seven-and-twenty years? I—at thirty-nine? None! Still I listened breathlessly for the girl's voice to answer.

“Can I wait?” That was all it said.

All, say I? All? In the tender, half-grieved tone, there breathed a world of love. A world that must have lifted Daymon to the seventh heaven, quickly as it seemed to crush and stifle me.

“Can I wait?” Heavens! I knew not that words could flow so sweetly. And this was the child of whom I—the clever man of the world, the gallant Commander of the *Dainty*—had thought: “She hardly knows what love means.”

I had my answer; and now what right had I to the cushions and curtains—I, the complacent fool of thirty-nine? None.

With bitter thoughts, which were to bear bitter fruit, I turned back to find my way

anywhere, so that it was out of hearing, out of sight of cushioned bliss—mutual felicity.

I soon passed the dancers, and on into the refreshment-room.

Several men had congregated there; amongst them Carson, and Dogherty, the Second Lieutenant and Surgeon of the *Dainty*—Daymon was our Senior Lieutenant.

I joined them rather than stand alone to be stared at; for it seemed to me that everyone did stare pityingly.

The Doctor—Dogherty—had entered the navy quite recently.

According to a legend—for which, I believe, we were indebted to Carson—it would appear that whilst sinking deep in debt and bog in his native country, he had observed floating past its emerald shores a raft of large dimensions, upon which were firmly lashed a barrel or cask, and a box or casket. Making a desperate effort, he had extricated himself from the aforesaid “Irish bonds,” and swam to the raft, when, to his great joy, he discovered that a liquid, fit for the gods, filled

the barrel, labelled "Navy Rum," whilst food for princes reposed in the box under the label of "Ship's Biscuit."

For three days he ceased not to drink of that navy rum and to eat of that ship's biscuit. Then, as the cravings of nature seemed to be almost satisfied, and life still to have something of sweetness, a sudden bump upset the biscuit, spilt the rum, and a voice in a strange tongue bade him be of good cheer, for there was plenty more where that came from—or words to that effect.

Starting to his feet suddenly, he upset three of his nearest male relatives, who had apparently been assisting in his potations, as he beheld, as through a mist, the Promised Land—the land of rum and biscuits—whilst seemingly near at hand was a large, though shadowy, fleet of boats, upon each of which was legibly inscribed: "Admiralty. For Netley Hospital and Irish Medical bait boat."

In this manner, asserts the legend, Dogherty and many of his countrymen obtain—with little or no expense to themselves—an

introduction to the medical sea service of their Sovereign.

Until now I had done little but laugh at our fresh-caught Doctor, and he must have been surprised that I did not attempt any chaff as I drank my liquor alongside him.

“ You ought to have come in a few minutes sooner,” said Carson. (“ Would that I had,” thought I). “ Dogherty has been romancing to any extent. He says that up the Persian Gulf we shall see the Alma tree, on which there is always either blossom or fruit, and some other wonderful contrivance which bows its branches as one approaches it.”

“ Faith, I don’t say anything about it myself,” vehemently interposed Dogherty ; “ I only repeat what other folk say about it :

That courteous tree,
Which bows to all who seek its canopy.”

“ Can you believe ‘em ? ” jerked out Carson with considerable scorn. He was generally inclined to the principle that seeing is believing. “ Can you believe them ? ” he

cried ; “ because—well, dash it, d’ye see—I don’t ! ”

He spluttered fiercely for a moment and glanced at me, but I felt no inclination to join in the conversation.

“ If you believe what those fellows tell you in books, my goodness ! ” he continued, turning pityingly towards Dogherty, “ well, those Eastern fellows especially. Why, I read once that the Phœnix has fifty orifices in his bill, which are continued to his tail ; and that, after living a thousand years, he builds himself a funeral pile, sings a melodious air of different harmonies through his fifty organ pipes, flaps his wings with a velocity which sets fire to the wood, and so—well, dash it !—consumes himself ; and they say that those Mahomedan swine believe it ! ”

At any other time I should have laughed at Carson’s wild mixture of the real and the fabulous ; but now I had nothing to say to it, and stood thoughtfully before the glasses, until the discovery that I was the only person left in the room made me hasten off to my boat.

The *Dainty* gun-vessel was lying in the stream, so I was soon on board, and shirking a last "B. and S." which was circulating in the ward-room, I made straight for my own cabin to think and, if possible, to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

I DID sleep, and awoke in better spirits. There could be no doubt that Edith and Daymon loved one another, but they had agreed to wait, and many things might happen in three years. I decided to say nothing of what I had overheard, but to wait too.

What a continual rush that last day in England was! Some weeks before several of us had tried to insure our lives, but directly the Companies heard that the *Dainty* was bound for the Persian Gulf, they had their fancy price, and everything else seemed to be on the same lines.

The outfitters sent "our Mr. St. Ubbes" to take last instructions, also—a very big

“also”—to explain the facility with which they could receive remittances, and to inquire casually the address of parents or agents in England, so that they might apply to them for information concerning Officers’ movements, or, in other words, send in their bills on observing notice of the Officers’ deaths in the *Gazette*.

The little accounts which had been multiplying rapidly during the last fortnight were now urged upon us by “our young man” in person, and I was right glad to run away to lunch at General Elton’s.

Daymon would have come had I asked him, but the First Lieutenant’s place is on board his ship. He looked surprised when I told him that; but a Commander should be strict or the service must suffer, so I lunched at the Eltons’ alone.

Edith was very silent; I concluded because Daymon had not come for another “good-bye,” and having so concluded, I became sulky too. Old Elton prosed on about sunstrokes, fevers, and enlarged livers, winding up with a recom-

mendation to me to make a will without delay, as there was no telling what a day might bring forth, especially to those whose business lay upon the great waters. I agreed with him, but added, perhaps rudely, that, after all, the fish were the only creatures concerned in the matter. Edith would have thought my remark worthy a laugh once upon a time, but now she was thinking of Daymon.

At two o'clock I was on board again, and at four we sailed. Early on the evening before, I had dreaded the morrow which should separate me from Edith, and had hated the tie that bound me to the service ; to-day I welcomed the separation, and grew happier at each succeeding knot as we ran down Channel before a strong easterly breeze, for I had Daymon with me. There was great comfort in that, let them poetise about love's unselfishness as they will ! I had him with me.

It took us a couple of months to reach Aden, stopping at several ports on the way. There had been plenty of variety so far, and

we soon started on again for Muscat, to depend principally upon our own society for amusement during the greater part of three years. How should we like that?

At Muscat we should meet the *Eagle*, the ship we had come out to relieve. At Muscat also I hoped to hear from Edith. I should score over Daymon there, for, as far as I could learn, Edith and himself did not correspond.

Was the weather trying me, or was my solitary life beginning to tell?

Goodness only knows. I did not care to read now, and had no special pursuit; besides, Daymon seemed to be everywhere, and always trying to contradict me. No; it was not the weather, for we were only at the end of February, with Muscat fifty miles distant. It was hot, certainly, but by no means unpleasantly so, especially since on leaving Aden we had adopted the usual Persian Gulf rig, viz., thin jersey, white trousers, shoes, and tunic buttoning up to the throat, with white pith hat. In this dress, and keeping under the awnings during

the heat of the day, we lived in comparative comfort so far; but even now the mere thought of white shirts, stiff collars, and blue frock-coats, in short, of all that constitutes our naval uniform proper or improper, made one bare one's neck to the breeze and look to the ice machine for forgetfulness. And this was the end of February—outside the Gulf. How should we feel it in the middle of the "Green Sea" in July? No use in baring the neck when the breeze, if it came at all, would blow dry and scorching from the desert oven; no use looking for a sufficiency of congealed comfort from the very handiest of refrigerators. I had plenty of time for these and equally pleasant thoughts as I tramped up and down the quarter-deck or the cabin, or sat in my arm-chair at the open door and watched Daymon bustling about the deck. He seemed to me to be always bustling about; I could not keep my eyes off him.

Apparently the ward-room fellows found plenty to do. As for me, I might have em-

ployed myself too a few months ago, but now I could only think, and there was no messmate to drop in and slap me on the back and tell me to "buck up, old boy ; it's all in the commission."

We were fifty miles from Muscat ; fifty miles from Edith's letter. Was it strange that I should wonder perpetually what it would contain ; above all, what messages for Daymon ? For those two had been chums from early childhood—such chums that I had never thought of other love between them—and messages to him would come as a matter of course.

Well ! I sat for hours thinking, and occasionally turning over the leaves of the Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions for Captains.

I could always hear what was going on in the ward-room ; indeed, it would have been scarcely safe to whisper a secret in the old *Dainty*, and I soon found myself listening to a long, rambling yarn of Carson's, the moral of which was "never refuse a *hoot*,"

or, as far as I could understand, "a drink."

"Dismal Jemmy." They called me dismal. The name was not so complimentary as the "Jack Norris" I had answered to through many a jovial commission ; but I was getting used to it. My name had changed as I had—no more.

"Dismal Jemmy hasn't made anyone's life miserable to-day ; he must be seedy," continued Carson, sinking his voice a little, for I had told them that their conversation often reached me.

"He's thinking what new devilment he can be at," growled old Ellis, the chief engineer, who generally had a grievance to ventilate, and always a piece of oily "waste" to rub between his hands while ventilating it.

"He's bound to put a shot or two into us, just to commence with," said Daymon in his abominably cheerful way. And then, to avoid hearing more, he came on deck, and I saw him superintending the sweepers like any old charwoman.

It was hard to get up a row with Daymon. Even I, with nothing particular to do beyond interfering with everyone, had failed to make him show fight.

I listened again for the voices in the ward-room.

“ Daymon’s a deuced sight too good to have to be bullied by our dismal friend upstairs,” said Carson, after a few minutes’ silence. “ In fact,” he continued, “ we all are. Life in a small craft is only fit for what you call niggers. Think of the misery of having to keep clear of a man in a box: a man who, because he’s Captain, thinks he has a right to teach the Doctor to operate, the Paymaster to make his cash account, and himself to pray and preach better than any Parson afloat.”

“ Quartermaster ! ” I sang out—I had a bell to ring for him, but who had so good a right to yell as I ?—“ Quartermaster, tell Mr. Carson I want him.”

Up came Carson with a face wearing about as much expression as an old piece of shoe-leather.

“Sir,” said he, disrespectfully as I thought.

“Oh! Mr. Carson!” said I; “be good enough to bring me your Journal for inspection at the end of the month.”

“Very good, sir,” replied Carson; but a murmured “Loathsome brute!” as he turned away made me smile.

“And, Mr. Carson!” I went on, “about the night watches! I wish you always to keep the middle watch in future.”

“But I don’t!” he commenced.

“You are not required to give an opinion,” interrupted I with a sneer—for was I not captain? “If either the Senior or Navigating Lieutenants like to keep it for you, they can.” He hadn’t a word to say, and I blessed the “Queen’s Regulations and Admiralty Instructions.”

The First Lieutenant always kept the morning watch, and the Navigating Officer was on deck too often, both by night and day, to care to keep anyone else’s “middle.”

“The brute must have been listening again,” I heard Carson say as soon as he

got back to the ward-room. "Confound him! I'll weather him yet, though. He thinks me an ass, but I've got him there anyhow. By simple force of imagination, I've got him. I think him a fool."

This was greeted with loud laughter, and appeared to be considered a good joke. "And this is the—well, dash it—fellow," he continued in spluttering and stammering wonderment, "who as a—well, dash it—Lieutenant, was one of the best fellows—well, dash it—going. Wonderful, isn't it?"

"He hadn't got command of a ship on an infernal station, with nothing to do but hunt up rows, then," chimed in Ellis.

"It must be awfully slow for a man living so entirely by himself," said Daymon pityingly. "I fancy too that he must have heard bad news just before we left England, or something of that sort."

"You do! confound you!" thought I. "By Gad! old Ellis is right. That's what I want now, to stifle wretchedness and monotony. Rows! The more rows the

better!" and I sang out again, more loudly this time, for Daymon's special benefit: "Quartermaster! Quartermaster! Is the First Lieutenant on deck?"

"No, sir," answered the Quartermaster.

"Has he been on deck?"

"Not for the last few minutes, sir."

"It seems to me that he never is on deck," said I loudly.

Then I waited, tramping up and down the cabin, chuckling to myself at how safely, in my position of Commander, I could lie and laugh at remonstrances. Good Heavens! what a beast I was in those days!

In a very few minutes Daymon appeared and asked to speak to me.

"Certainly," said I. "Sit down, Mr. Daymon. What can I do for you?"

I laughed inwardly as I noted his perplexed look. He spoke firmly though, and did not sit down. I have since thought that he regarded me as being not quite right in the head, and perhaps he had good reason.

“I am sorry, sir, that you should think it advisable to ask one of the ship’s company if I am doing my duty,” said he.

“Ah, that’s unfortunate; most unfortunate! Won’t you sit down?” remarked I, carelessly seating myself, and looking at him with an air of pity and inquiry.

“It is, as you say, most unfortunate, sir,” he resumed, yet more firmly, “and I object——”

“Object, do you?” cried I. “Then you’ll give me your reasons in writing for being off deck.” I would at least give him the trouble of writing me a “service” letter I thought.

But he was too clever for me.

“Yes, sir, I object,” he said quietly; “and I decline to give my reasons in writing, as you have no legal right to make me incriminate myself.”

“What?” I yelled at him, wild with rage. “You’ll threaten me, will you? You’re insubordinate! You’re——”

But I have written enough concerning a

part of my life, upon which I look back with disgust and wonderment.

This day was a fair sample of many which had preceded it; when, having driven every Officer in the ship to the verge of desperation, I would sit silent and morose in my cabin pondering over imaginary wrongs, and thinking how to crush out the least semblance of joviality in all beneath me, regarding it as an insult to myself.

In those days I knew the hell born of solitude and wretched thoughts. The solitude I brought for the most part upon myself; the thoughts I nursed and treasured up until I could bring them into action; and what better chance, what fairer field of action could be afforded any man than that which lays within the power of any naval Commander on a monotonous station?

I can look back now upon that change in my life, and thank God that only for a short time did curses give chase to laughter, good-fellowship give place to bitterness; and that it was upon this very day which I am

recalling that a true knowledge of the hell I had created for myself first dawned upon me.

Strong language, you say—and strong language is needed.

CHAPTER III.

IT was after sunset, and I smoked a cigarette in lonely state in my cabin, for—in strict conformity with the instructions—I had decided that the officers might smoke, “with the least inconvenience to the service,” in the lee gangway only.

Daymon was below writing a letter; possibly, I thought, sending messages to Edith, so I took occasion to send for him and make minute inquiries about the routine of the ship.

The breeze had freshened considerably, and gave me a good excuse for having everyone on deck to reef topsails.

After that I kept Daymon talking whilst I smoked, and wound up the conversation by

remarking that not a boat in the ship seemed properly secured, and that they were all filthily dirty.

“Ill-conditioned brute,” you say—and so I was; but there was no one to tell me so—I was the Commander.

Daymon jumped into the boat nearest us, in order that he might stand upon her outer gunwale; and knowing that she was secure enough and that I should be proved in the wrong, I strolled forward to see, if perchance, I might find a more favourable opening for my favourite amusement—annoyance.

Another second, and the shout of “man overboard” rang through the ship. “‘Way lifeboat’s crew !” came the shout, quick pipe of the boatswain’s mate, piercing and thrilling through one as no other pipe can;—then, the orderly rush of the whole ship’s company—every man to his station, and woe betide him who bars the way—every man to “pull his pound,” to do “all he knows,” that the Officer of the Watch’s orders may

be carried out, and his shipmate—no time yet to ask who it is, no time for ought but a clear head and a ready hand—rescued, if human skill can rescue him.

Daymon had fallen !

I knew it even before I rushed to our small bridge to take charge of the ship. Daymon was overboard, and I grew pale at the thought—the wish that flashed through me, quick and thrilling as the shrill pipe.

For a moment I stood irresolutely looking at the boat.

“ Shall I lower, sir ? ” said the Officer of the Watch.

“ No—I can’t have it—it’s not safe,” I answered hurriedly, and turned to look at the compass—to look anywhere, rather than towards the figure not a hundred yards distant struggling with the curled waves and thin pitiless spray.

“ Not safe ! ” echoed he. “ Not safe ? Why, the sea is nothing much, sir—the boat could live in it easily.”

No one but ourselves heard what passed

between us. The man stationed to lower the boat had already started the falls; the crew looked eagerly—not angrily yet—towards me.

The Officer of the Watch was right; the boat could live in the sea—heavy though it was—with ease; but I answered sullenly, my face still turned away from that buffeting with death: “You hear me; it’s not safe.” Gracious Heavens! can the powers of evil make a man speak as well as think; turn a restless man into a murderer; drive him mad in a moment?

With a dull cloud veiling my sight, blunting my every faculty, I stood motionless. A low murmur from the men, not quite of anger even yet—they had always trusted their Officers—but of wonder; a wondering eagerness to know what they had to do reached me; and as I listened, half stupidly, Carson’s voice sounded close at my ear as he jumped up on the bridge: “It’s murder!” he was saying; “cowardly murder!”

I turned slowly towards him, still with the sullen blunted feeling upon me.

"Gad ! He's ill ! Lower away," he ordered.
"Lower away—well, dash it—cheerily, men."

I started forward, with what wild object I dare not think. My first mad wish was alone present with me—the man who owned Edith's love was drowning ; every moment wasted now would smooth my way to her !

Scarcely had I moved before a sharp cry of pain arose from the lifeboat—my coxswain Blunt, always the first man in the boat, had caught his fingers in the block.

"D—nation ! We shall drown him between us yet," cried Carson, whilst I dared not speak. "Pull up the fall again, men," he continued excitedly. "Another minute lost through that fellow's fingers !"

"No time'll be lost through me, please God ! Lower away, Jim, and be hanged to ye," growled out Blunt. Then an irrepressible groan burst from him, as without a word from the lowerers, the falls were eased away again and the obstacle—torn away.

I could bear no more ! I thank God that at that groan I fainted.

When I regained my senses I lay on the sofa in my cabin alone, whilst on the deck outside was stretched Daymon's apparently lifeless form ; the Doctor and the rest of his messmates kneeling anxiously beside him trying hard to restore consciousness.

For a few moments I remained quiet. What had Carson thought ? What excuse had I ?

The questions followed one another quickly ; but, before I had time to answer them, Carson himself was at my side.

“ All right again, sir ? ” he asked. Ah ! the relief his tone and words gave me !

Of course he had believed me to be ill. How could he suspect what had been in my mind, before—overstrained by its guilty thoughts—it had lost itself, I thank God, at the very moment of their shameful victory ?

I sat up quickly, unable to repress a start—he little guessed that it was of shame—as my eye fell again upon the group at the cabin door.

"Thank you. I am better," I answered slowly, not trusting myself to say more.

Then Carson spoke again, apologising I think for having lowered the lifeboat without orders, as he had seen at once that I was ill.

"Yes—I fainted," I muttered abruptly, almost unconsciously, for I had drawn near to where Daymon lay.

And so—though I never cloaked my sins with a lie—it came to be generally understood that I had really been ill for a long time, and that the sudden excitement and anxiety had overpowered me. Well, after all, had it not been illness?

I stood and looked anxiously down upon the figure, which, in my madness, I would have left to the waves; and his messmates, except those who fought death's battle for him, drew back silently that I might so look down; I, his cowardly rival! God! if they had only known!

But nothing was known to them, save the terrible eagerness with which I searched

for signs of life, and which I sought not to restrain.

If the blood still throbbed through his veins, it was but imperceptibly. I could feel nothing; neither could I wait patiently and watch.

There was still hope; we all understood that.

Most of us had known—in one case or another of the many we had witnessed—of struggles, yet more desperate than this one, in which life had at last triumphed.

But how could I watch?

I walked restlessly to and fro the cabin, thinking—thinking, until I forced aside the veil which had of late shadowed my mind, and saw my life as I had really lived it—saw it in its bitterness, its ignominy.

And, if he should die now! Here! at my feet!

Was not the thought enough to tear down the blackest cloud man's gloom and guilt ever created?

A stir amongst the group of watchers, and I was again beside the outstretched figure!

One glance told me enough.

Years have passed since I nerved myself to take that glance. Years, during which the blood has been growing colder, the senses more dulled; yet now, as I write, my cheek flushes, my hand quivers at the remembrance.

The figure had life!—Daymon lived!

I cannot attempt to describe what I felt. I only know that feelings such as mine were could come to a man but once in his lifetime, and then either to mend or to mar him; for no second experience could carry such weight for good or evil.

To me the terror had come in time—but I can write no more of it.

We had passed Ras el Hadd at daylight; and long before dusk the mass of rugged hills, terminating in the 'Saddle' some few miles

to the southward of Muscat, had been visible. At 9.30, by the aid of a rising moon, we made out Sudah Point, and then crept slowly along the coast, expecting every moment to sight the Arab city.

There was no sign to tell us that we were within a couple of miles of one of the prettiest-shaped little harbours anywhere. We shortened and furled sails, and slowly sounded our way under steam along the barren coast; or, rather, we kept the hand-leads going to warn us if soundings were obtainable. The Arabs are unenlightened—so are their barren coasts.

“Better anchor for the night, sir!” suggested Wildman, our Navigating Lieutenant.

“Hold on a minute,” said I. “I believe I can just make out the Fisher’s Rock. Don’t you see? There!—on the port bow.”

Wildman had a good look through his night glasses once more.

“Right, sir,” said he. “We can go on again full speed. That’s the rock, though the tide is high and one can scarcely see it.”

We rattled ahead once more, and in ten minutes were almost abreast The Fisher. Another minute and Wildman ordered "Hard a starboard!" and we turned our nose sharp round into the snug cove of Muscat.

There was hardly a breath of wind, and we steamed towards the old Portuguese castle on Muscat Island—outside which we had just passed, and which forms the eastern boundary of the cove—to the music of our twin screws and the leadsman's "soundings" only.

No sooner had we entered the harbour, than the monotonous beat of the tom-toms, the clapping of hands, and the unvarying chant of the Seedie boy and Arab dhowmen welcomed us from the dhows anchored off Makalla, under the west castle, proclaiming that the majestic Arab had unbent, and was solacing himself, after the exertion of scratching the previous night's mosquito bites, and of keeping off the flies in the sunshine, by a friendly cancan in the moonlight.

Lights moved in the Residency and on board H.M.S. *Eagle*, which lay at anchor

across the Gap between Duweirah and Muscat Island. How we were to bless that Gap, and the gentle breeze, which often enough blew through it alone, to ruffle the burning waters of the cove.

The high forts of Jalláli and Merani at either extremity of the city stand out against the dull, hilly background, white and ghostly in the moonlight; but on a sudden the flash of gunpowder bursts from each, and the very material lungs of the Arab watchmen follow suit from all the look-out towers of the neighbouring hills, as the vocal concert which is to make night hideous commences, acquainting the wily Bedouin, who may be prowling without the gates, that he will not approach them unobserved, and screeching security into the tuneless ears of the tom-tom players.

Directly opposite the Sultan's Palace—gleaming whitewashedly in the middle of the flat-roofed, crumbling houses—we anchored; and soon afterwards one of the Lieutenants of the *Eagle* came on board with our mails.

How hurriedly I opened Edith's letter!

How eagerly I devoured its contents ; and how bitterly I stifled a groan that "I might have known it," as I read !

Her letter was friendly—very friendly ; affectionate even ! But loving ? No !—a thousand times over—no !

The renowned, but fancy-framed "Prester John," popularly supposed to hold sway in the remote East during the fifteenth century ; the often delineated, but none the less unsubstantial Island of St. Brandon, popularly supposed to have been seen by the people of the Canaries until Columbus sailed over its marked position on the chart, had more existence than ever had her love for me.

Well ! Why should I swear ? I knew it before.

And yet I did swear, again and again, as I read and re-read her messages to Daymon ; until, frightened at my own thoughts, I closed my eyes, to sleep for the first time at anchor off the Arab city.



Part II.

EDITH'S RECOLLECTIONS.



CHAPTER I.

“WELL, Norris, shall we see you at the ball to-night ?” asked my Uncle George, seating himself, without the smallest idea that he was a nuisance, right between Captain Norris and me.

The garden of our house at Plympton was absurdly small, and even if one—or shall we say “two ?”—did unwittingly stroll beyond the ken of the windows, Uncle George was sure to be prowling along a side walk, or reclining upon the sole garden seat, which one—or say “two”—had expected to find empty. Not that I cared !

Poor Uncle George ! After all, it was his holiday time : I could make allowance for that. He was home on six months’ leave from

a dreadful Indian place where he was a political somebody. I forget how to spell the name of the place ; but he once told me that the women there rode on camels crosswise—just like men—and had magnificent figures. And then he asked me how old I was, and when I said, with a pleasant smile, “seventeen all but eleven months,” and expanded my chest ever so little, he said “Ah !” in his most casual tone, and turned away. I know that English girls of sixteen are not—what he called those little Indian chits of twelve—fully developed ; but he needn’t have said “Ah !” and turned away.

But, as I have said, I made allowances for Uncle George. Captain Norris and I had several pursuits in common, such as botany, and—and other things ; and he used to say in his peculiar way, which always made me doubt whether he was chaffing or not, that he was indebted to me for reawakening in him a love for Nature’s beauties.

I used to laugh at his pretty speeches ; but however much I laughed, he never said “Ah !”

and turned away—quite the contrary. Certainly he was not my uncle, and so wouldn't like to be bearish.

But I am forgetting the conversation on the garden seat. "I'm afraid I have too much writing to do," he said, replying to Uncle George. "To-morrow afternoon we must sail, and there is still a lot to do." He glanced quickly at me, so I buried my nose in a moss rosebud which he had just picked for me. The morning's lesson had included moss roses.

"But perhaps," he resumed, "if I bear a hand"—he sometimes used those delightfully curious sailor-like phrases—"if I bear a hand," then said he, "I can finish in time." And then I guessed that he would look my way again, so I put his moss rosebud carefully in the bosom of my dress, fearing lest my warm hand should make it wither.

"I shall be there, Elton," said he positively, as he jumped up; "good-bye for the time. Good-bye, Edith—for the time." And off he went with his great strides to the

railway-station. He always made his age an excuse for calling me Edith, though I had left school at the end of the last term. But he was many, many years younger than Papa, or Uncle George, and nothing made me so savage as to be told by that stupid Julia Manse—who I was convinced doted on him herself—that he was old enough to be my father. He certainly was not old enough to be hers—the old cat!

Well, Captain Norris had not been gone very long before dear Julia dropped in to hear if I still meant to wear “all white” that evening, so we settled down in my room to talk it over; and really when Captain Norris is not near, Julia can be very pleasant, notwithstanding her great age.

At last the time came to start. Mrs. Manse and Julia—in yellow, of all colours in the world; and Papa, and Ernie Daymon—who had come over from “Broadlands” to dine and go with us—and myself, drove to the Plymouth Guildhall together.

It was Ernie’s last evening in England

too, for he was appointed Senior Lieutenant of the *Dainty*—Captain Norris's ship. “Broadlands,” his father's house, was not far from ours, and Ernie and I were tremendous chums.

“As thick as pea-soup,” he said; but that's a sailor-like expression which I do not care about. Captain Norris never used it.

However, Ernie and I had always been great chums; chums, you know, nothing else. He had a *fiancée*, miles away, in London, though I was the only one who knew it.

“Ah! here you are, Edith!” said Captain Norris directly we arrived—thank goodness, uncrumpled—in the dancing-room. “I'm too old for round dances”—he would keep on about his age—“but we'll march through a 'square' or two, if 'Barkis is willing.'”

“Miss Elton is willing, if she's asked properly,” I answered saucily; and then I allowed him to scrawl “Jack Norris” against every square dance in the programme.

What a glorious evening that was! I danced every dance.

That extraordinary man, Mr. Carson, was

great fun. He would keep going right through a waltz, lest—as he said—he should do me, or the music—I forget which—an injustice. I wish he wasn't quite so excitable though; for then he stammers and often comes out with very strong language. Poor fellow! He doesn't mean anything by it, I'm sure. Julia's "bother" is much more wicked swearing, and the way she ran about after Captain Norris that evening was positively sinful. And she's thirty if she's a day, and looks it.

It may be nasty to say so, but I was awfully glad when something happened which made me know that the poor dear old soul would be sold in that direction.

When I told that curious Mr. Carson so, as we sat in the sweetest of little rooms, he said quite sharply: "You should never—well, dash it—pun; it's doing the English language an injustice."

"Hush! you mustn't say such dreadful things," said I.

Whereupon he looked at me in silent amazement—and, I must confess, nothing of

admiration—for some seconds. Then he said, still looking at me so hard that I began to fear that either my hair or my dress was coming down: "What?" I can't help it, he said it again—"What—well, dash it—things?" I laughed then and felt just a little uncomfortable. The peculiar expression, which I have softened into "dash it," was evidently a trick of his, and perhaps—I was dreadfully young, you know—perhaps it was the fashion amongst naval men, even though Captain Norris did not use it.

So I felt just a little uncomfortable, but managed to answer clearly: "Oh! nothing. That is, nothing of any consequence. Shall we go now?" I added, ruffling my skirts viciously; for feeling uncomfortable was with me but one step from being angry.

Luckily, just as I'm certain he was thinking, "What a little fool?" the band struck up again, and of course I was all maidenly anxiety to join the dance.

As we left the little room, who should be coming towards it but Papa and Captain

Norris. Jack—I mean Captain Norris—I only found out the other day that his name was Jack—seemed in a violent hurry, and the dad just a trifle bored; but neither of them noticed us, and what those two warriors could want in that room was beyond me to imagine. I was soon to find out.

Ernie and I had a lovely waltz after I had got rid of Mr. Carson, and then we went together to my sweet little room, but just as we were going in I heard—something, and something which certainly deserves another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

“So you really love the little woman?” queried Papa in tones of—I am forced to admit—intense surprise.

We were close to the door, when he spoke, and I made a clutch at Ernie’s arm just in time to prevent his entering. I was dreadfully young, as he had often impressed upon me; but I knew—perhaps better than he did—that we were not wanted in there.

I was dreadfully young. I often owned it to myself with a frown at my glass, and a tear in my eye; but I smiled to think that I knew the voice which would answer, and what its answer would be.

“Through her alone, General, I know what love means.”

That was all it said ;—his voice—Captain Norris's voice of course.

I moved back quickly, repeating the words—his words—softly to myself. “Through her alone I know what love means.” It was all so sudden ! And now he was actually speaking to Papa. The deep colour spread over my neck and face, and for a moment I felt rather dismayed, for his words and tone taught me what a man's love really meant and how much power is intrusted to even a school-girl to influence either for good or for evil.

“ Oh! ho! Sits the wind in that quarter ? ” laughed Ernie. “ Seems to be a hot wind, too, ” he added with another most odious grin at my burning face.

Farewell to sentimentality then ! I always knew how to avenge a personal insult ; and if Ernie's arm wasn't blue next day, may I never pinch man's arm again.

When we reached the ball-room, Captain Norris soon came to claim his dance. He was in high spirits, and I concluded that the sweet dad had been agreeable. Why I kept on

blushing whenever he spoke to me I can't conceive, unless a vague and certainly novel notion that he might at any moment fall upon his knees at my feet, or, after some peculiar system of faith, worship the ground I trod upon, caused the modest blood to burn.

I should blush now to record my own simplicity; but both spontaneous colouring and simplicity were quite ordinary girlish characteristics in those days, and—however, it's absurd to attempt an excuse. Blood is thicker than powder, and even now when I think of that evening's happiness—I do it again.

But I am wandering off to my puff and parchment period, when I should still be all dimples and daintiness.

To return to that evening.

Captain Norris utterly failed to perform any of Love's antics, and—though I didn't want him to make an idiot of himself—I've no patience with a man who doesn't squeeze your hand when you want—I mean when you leave it in his.

I daresay he was nervous, poor fellow! and men are so outrageously respectful to us, at times—generally the wrong times. I think, too, that perhaps he did mean to squeeze it once or twice; but I am young and of dark complexion, and I like it hard. I do not assume for a Blonde's feelings; they are inscrutable.

I tried to get up just the least bit of a flirtation with Doctor Dogherty towards the small hours, and he came out wonderfully. In my experience all men flirt, though some wrap it up in casual expressions and call it "trotting her out" or "doing the civil." But of all things defend me, I am so young, from the man who leaves his wife to show one "a little attention."

Julia sneers and says that all women, who know anything of the world, like the flavour of the stolen fruit best. If that is so, say I fiercely, I'm glad that I've always lived at Plympton, and sorry that I'm not a man.

"Wait a bit, my dear," says Julia with

an aggravating laugh. "And what can one do then? It's hardly open to one in this life to refuse to wait."

But to return to my attempted flirtation with Doctor Dogherty! Ernie actually told me afterwards that he, the Doctor, puts down everything of the least importance in his journal. Isn't it nasty of him?

Luckily, I was very careful what I said, if possible even more careful than usual, and, still, I wish he didn't keep a journal; and I wonder what sort of things he thinks "important!"

Ernie would chaff me too about Captain Norris, but he stopped when I asked him, seeing that I was serious.

We had quite a long talk all to ourselves in that delightful little room. Ernie was most interesting about his *fiancée*. Poor things! they have to wait for three years, without once writing to one another, isn't it barbarous?

He seemed a little doubtful, I'm sure without the slightest reason, as to whether

I cared sufficiently for Captain Norris to wait so long as three years for him.

“Can I wait?” I answered, rather loudly. “Can I wait, indeed? As well ask, can I love?”

I made him promise that never as long as he lived would he breathe a syllable of our conversation to Captain Norris; otherwise there’s no knowing what he mightn’t tell during one of their dreadful night watches. Just think of two girls keeping watch at night, and trying, even for an hour, to keep a secret from one another!

Why, it would be sinful to expect such a thing!

I wonder if men are to be trusted!

I suppose Captain Norris went away from the ball early, for he did not come to claim his last dance. Not that I cared! But I think that—considering everything—he might have wished me good-night; especially as he managed to find Julia—at least she said so.

Dances are stupid things after all, and it would have been much more pleasant to have

remained at home for a quiet game of chess with Uncle George. Not that there was the slightest necessity for Julia to echo my words in our dining-room—after we got back—with a little flabby sigh.

Any schoolgirl could have seen her little game, and no method is more hateful than that of keeping two irons in the fire. Julia always said that a girl who couldn't manage, at all events, two, ought to be ashamed of herself; and when Uncle George—without even looking at me—responded to her compliments with a sigh of increased flabbiness and murmured something about the “light of a woman’s smile,” I felt that, in Julia’s place, with Julia’s principles, I should have had no cause to blame my management.

In my own place, and with my own settled, and undeviating principles, I felt disgusted.

Mrs. Manse looked tenderly at ‘her girlie,’ as she called her, and patted her frizzly locks; then with a childish, petulant gesture the wayward little sunbeam vanished through the door, and we ordinary mortals all went to bed.

We all went to bed ; but how could I sleep ? I, who had but just received my first offer ? For, of course, it would count as one ; though, for all the use I could make of it, it might as well have been bottled up in an old phonograph to be rumbled out in some succeeding age. Still, there were so many things to keep one awake ! So many things to think of !

What had Papa said, and what would he say ?

How would Julia like it, and how should I like—— But then, I fell asleep.

His last day !

He couldn't go away and bury himself in that awful Persian Gulf without saying good-bye ; what would he say besides ?

As for me ! Well, I felt miserably cheap. It seemed as though I had forfeited the right to keep my secret since he had spoken. I seemed to belong to him already, bought at his own price, won without the asking ; I feared, I scarcely knew why or what ; yet amidst my fears I felt that at his voice they would vanish, leaving me forgetful of all

except the love that he had inspired. For I loved him. I knew it then in my childishness and inexperience ; I know it now when childhood has fled, and I learn the truth from my woman's heart. Ah, me ! If women could but show their love !

“Hear her ; only hear her !” you laugh, “as if they don't !”

Well, I am old-fashioned now, and was countrified then ; and perhaps they are right —those other ones.

But let me write of his last day !

I was trying to persuade myself that the *Dainty* had sailed, and that it really didn't matter to me, when the front gate slammed —he generally forgot gates, and Ernie always said that they were only to be tolerated when there were cows or landsmen ; so I jumped up and ran out to meet—Julia.

“Ah ! Edith dear ! How fresh you look, and what a colour you have !” said she, eyeing me for all the world like an ogress.

Of course I looked fresh, and why shouldn't I have a colour ?

“And you look wonderfully young this morning, dear,” said I, laughing—oh so pleasantly! and taking good care to keep her on the doorstep.

“Will you go for a walk this evening?” I asked. I thought that crafty. It would prevent her stopping; and besides the fact that before evening Captain Norris would have sailed, it happened that no other young lady walker was available at Plympton.

“Certainly, dear,” said she. “I’ll just leave this book with Captain Norris and come back in the evening.” She really had no shame.

“If you wish to see Captain Norris you will have to run after him in Plymouth,” I replied, rather spitefully I’m afraid; but I had caught a glimpse of the book she pretended he wanted, and I knew that he had read it already.

She gave me a curious look when I said that, and then turned away from my idiotic blushes.

“Well, good-bye till the evening,” she

said. "I'm sorry he hasn't come—for your sake, dear." With which parting shot she tripped away.

"I will be sure to write and tell him of your great disappointment about the book, dear," I called after her. But she was kissing her hand to Uncle George, who, thank goodness, didn't see her, and I went back to wait once more.

At last when lunch was ready, and I was muttering bitter things against the Commander-in-Chief at Plymouth for having sent the *Dainty* to sea all in a hurry, and Uncle George would keep agreeing with everything I said in his annoying way, though I knew I was talking nonsense and could see that he didn't care two pins what I said or what the Commander-in-Chief had done so long as we decided not to delay the tiffin. At last, I say again—for I really forgot where my flow of language commenced—Captain Norris arrived, with a slam of the big gates which was altogether unmistakable.

I was angry then, for he evidently might

have come before, considering everything, and I wouldn't go to meet him ; and when he came in I gave him my hand with a lofty indifference as to the amount of pressure it conferred or received, which was young-lady-like to sublimity.

But bless the man, he didn't care. As I've "come out" he seemed to expect it. Was there ever such sinful hypocrisy ? After what I heard, too !

However, two could play at that game ; so, as Ernie says, "I've got my back up," no, that's not the expression, that's shore-going ; I "put my helm up"—that's it—and "sheered off !" Scarcely a word said I as luncheon slowly proceeded, and from the moment that Uncle George carefully recalled to my memory each of my imprecations against the Commander-in-Chief, and asked—with one of his curried smiles—whether I was happy now ; I became dumb.

But, after all, I was thinking it doesn't matter a bit what happens in here, wait till we have our quiet stroll in the garden after-

wards ! I put great faith in a garden stroll, and—like other girls of my acquaintance—thought that I had good reason.

So, in pouting missy-ship, I sulked on ! nor did I recover until, in the middle of a tale Papa was droning out, about a man who had a sunstroke before he had made his will, or because he hadn't made it, or something, Captain Norris looked at his watch—he hadn't once looked at me—and said that he must hurry off.

Where were my sulks then ? I tried to believe that it was a joke, and laughed knowingly when Uncle George—who wanted his afternoon “caulk,” as Ernie calls his sleep or his snores, I forget which—said drowsily : “Well, we mustn’t detain you, old fellow, if you have your sailing orders, and—and—that.”

“Of course he has his orders,” exclaimed I. “His walking orders. ‘The usual routine,’ as Ernie says, so give me my hat and get yours, sir.”

He—Captain Norris—was getting his own

as I spoke, but showed no sign of bringing me mine, and I heard him mutter, sneeringly for him—"Ernie says."

Ah! that's what's the matter, thought I. He's had a row with Ernie. The stupid boy has been doing something wrong; but I hope he won't be very hard upon him.

So I began to try and find out all about it.

"Why didn't you bring Ernie, Captain Norris? I asked him to be sure and come, and now I shan't see him to say good-bye."

"You saw him last night I should think!" he said, almost rudely.

Poor Ernie! I thought. He'll have his "wheel spoked" or his "luff choked"—whatever those fearful things may be that he talks about, and then, just as I commenced to say a word or two in his favour, Captain Norris took both my hands in his for a moment, and held them fast whilst he muttered quickly, "You have promised to write, mind—you cannot forget that at any rate"—as if I wished to. And, whilst I was rubbing my fingers—I had been trying how poor mamma's

turquoise fitted the engaged one—he had swung the gate open, and was off at his customary speed, and, as usual, well in the centre of the road.

I wonder why naval men always prefer the centre of the road to the pavement? Ernie told me once that they were ordered to; and he really did show me a printed book called "The Rule of the Road," but I saw at once that it was poetry, and nothing to do with the roads at all. One part was, "In danger, with no room to turn. Ease her, stop her, go astern." That seems simple enough; but Ernie said that if they followed their rule of the road when on shore, and I can't see where else they would go to follow it, and "ported their helms" when meeting anything end on or nearly end on, they would be into the first carriage they met. No wonder sailors mutiny sometimes—"take charge," as Ernie says. Captain Norris tells me that all they want is plenty of sea room, and I'm sure that seems reasonable enough, poor fellows!

Well, until the horrid gate swung to and

shut him out, it never struck me that he was gone for good ; the last good-bye spoken without a smile from me ; and I rushed headlong after him, with a sort of hazy notion that even now it wanted but a word to bring him back.

Outside the gate I stopped, panting. He was already a good way off, and those two old frumps, the Miss Julies', were watching me from their window ; but I didn't care for that—not I.

“Good-bye, Captain Norris,” I shouted ; “good-bye ! and—and—come back as soon as you can, won't you ?” I added appealingly. He stopped for a moment and waved his stick. Would he stop for a proper “good-bye” I wondered.

Then with a great gulp I cried out again : “Say good-bye to Ernie for me, won't you ?”

I thought when first he stopped that he was coming back to me ; but he must have changed his mind, for, as I spoke again, he turned quickly and hurried off, whilst I ran into the house again and on quickly to my

own room to cry, as if my stupid, childish heart would break, for I loved him—I loved him. Almost unthinkingly I cried on until tears refused to come, and the misery of bitter, unavailing thought, succeeded—thoughts of the “might have been,” always so sad, always so bitter, when one’s own foolishness has caused the misery which “is.”

Then, too, for the first time, I felt that perhaps it was not me—that girl of whom he had spoken in the little room, and through whom alone he “knew what love meant.”

Ah! the wretchedness of that thought when first it came; the rush of the hundred others which huddled after it, to prove the first one right, as they always will—stupid things!

I was very miserable in quiet, little Plympton, yet grateful too, for its constant quiet and littleness.

Several weeks passed, and I received my first letter from Captain Norris, written from Suez.

My feeling had been right. Of gossip

and of description there was plenty ; a few sentences told of his solitary life on board, poor fellow ; but of love—nothing.

I replied with all the news of Plympton—accounts of the school feast on Whit-Monday ; the arrival of the new doctor—and sent messages to Ernie. Nothing I wrote should show him that I cared, or that the letter I was answering had shattered my last foolish hope.

After a long interval I heard again. The letter was kind, as before ; and I answered it this time with plenty of news on my side.

Julia Manse and Uncle George were to be married almost immediately, so that she could accompany him back to India on the expiration of his leave.

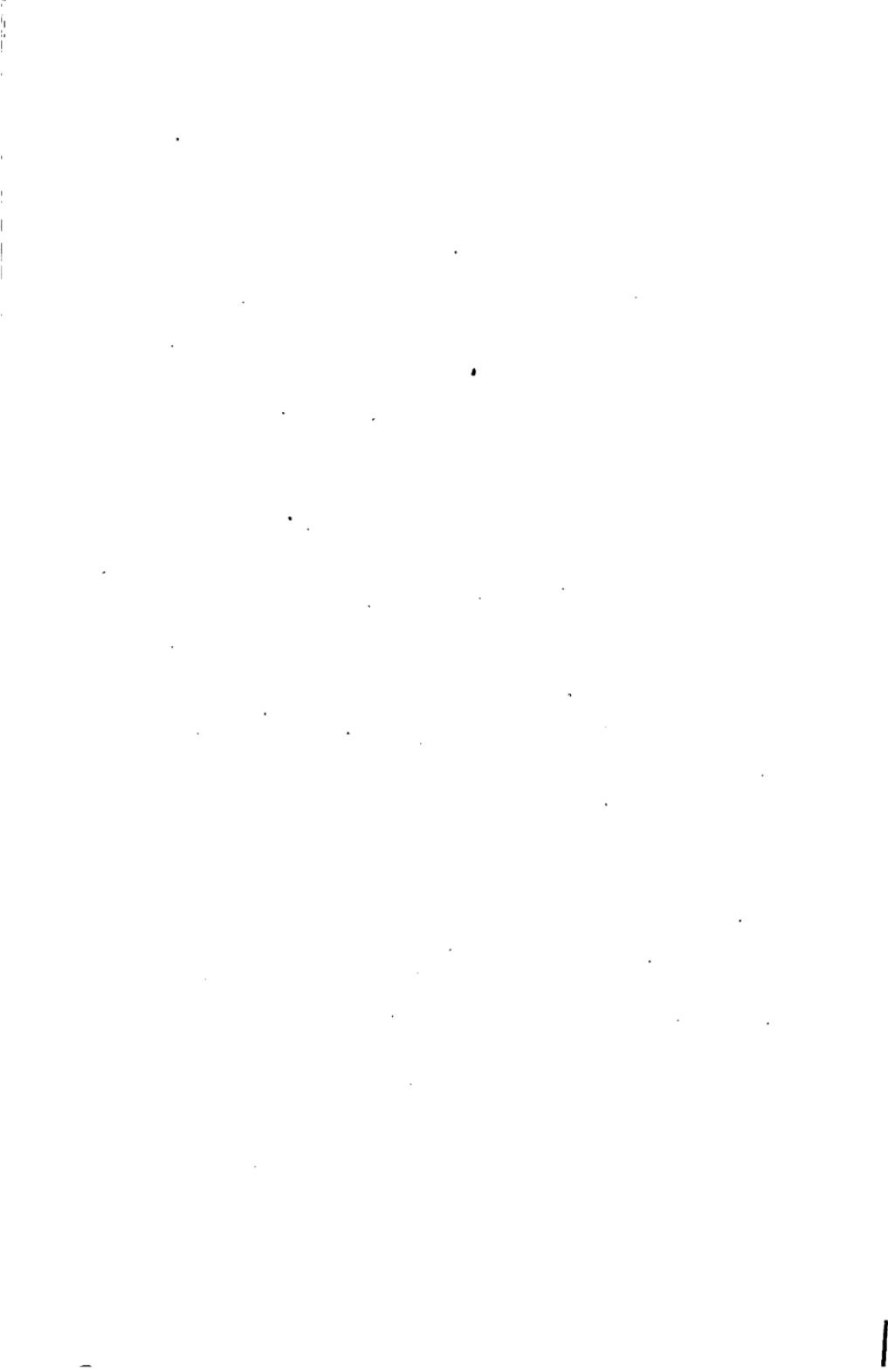
Some time before I had confided to Julia what I had overheard Captain Norris saying, and how I had made Ernie promise never to say anything about it. She seemed to be very surprised, and when I went on—for I longed to tell someone—with all my doubts and fears, she snapped out quite angrily : “Any idiot could see who he meant !”

It struck me at the time that she thought possibly it was herself; but the very next day she accepted Uncle George, and I'm sure anybody who would take him when—but, “handsomely, handsomely!” as Ernie says, and which means, I believe, “let him down easily.” He is my uncle.

The wedding was grand fun. Uncle George had plenty of money, and insisted upon taking all the expense. But it was soon over, and Plympton itself—and a little more so—again.

Months passed quickly by. Quiet, uneventful days with the dear Pater, when our greatest excitement was an afternoon tea at old Miss Julie's, or a railway journey to Plymouth, to listen to the band on the Hoe.

Plenty of quiet fun, too, we had in our little household, until a blow so terrible in its swiftness, so crushing in its power, fell without warning upon us, and I was left in the quietude—alone.



Part III.



CHAPTER I.

A YEAR makes but little difference in the general aspect of Muscat. A house or two may have crumbled away, and others be in course of muddy erection ; but the bird's-eye view remains much the same. The square, whitewashed building upon the shore contains the Sultan, his eunuchs, ministers, poultry, and wives ; the other square whitewashed building—also upon the shore—contains the British Political Agent's wife and the British Political Agent. Behind both buildings are more flat roofs of varying dimensions ; all on higher ground, though of less pretensions than either British Presidency or Arab Palace, but all showing a similar disposition—generally in an advanced stage—to crumble.

The long red flag of the Arab flies in as many places as a staff can be conveniently raised—wood is scarce in Muscat—and the Union Jack over the Residency proudly proclaims that England thinks proper to provide his Arab Majesty with an adviser, and, what is much more to the majestic taste, an allowance. This latter is sufficient to keep him in a couple of steam yachts, any number of horses and camels, a harem, and domestic slaves innumerable ; to bribe the Bedouins for miles around to offend English susceptibilities as little as may be ; to buy as many guns, turbans, coats, and daggers as he thinks proper ; and to leave still a big surplus laid by against a possible disagreement with the civil and liberal Christian.

The heat of the day is over, and high above the native bazaar—upon the roof of the Residency itself—a light breeze is beginning to stir. The day has been hotter than usual, and English high life has been taking its rest behind the jalousies, well beneath the swing of the punkahs.

Now—five o'clock—it emerges; and the Political Agent and his wife take the air upon their housetop—take it at their ease, and plentifully bedewed with whiskeyed soda.

Listen to what Aberigh Mackay—the famous “Sir Ali Baba” of Anglo-Indian, indeed of European, faine—says of political agents :

“A Political Agent cannot be taken to England. The purple bloom fades in the scornful climate of England; the paralytic swagger passes into sheer imbecility; the 13-gun tall-talk reverberates in jeering echoes; the Chuprassies are only so many black men, and the Rajah is felt to be a joke. The Political Agent cannot live beyond Aden.”

But there is little enough “purple bloom” about Her Majesty’s representative at Muscat. Chuprassies and 13-gun salutes are few, swagger is impossible. The Political Agent, as I take him, in the somewhat prosaic language of the West, is something between a Town Councillor and a Lion-tamer.

However—take him as you like—here he is, at home in Muscat !

The "Political Agent and Consul" reclines upon a long cane-bottomed chair, the arms of which project sufficiently far to afford rest to his elevated and outstretched continuations; the moisture takes its rise from within easy reach of his hand.

The Political Agent and Consul's wife reclines with equal grace of attitude upon a yet lower chair, whilst the handy position of her glass reduces the chance of a slip, ere reaching the lip, to a minimum, and argues well for the consumption of the liquor.

"I hope you are satisfied now," she grumbled at her husband. "In another week you'll have your dear Edith to talk to again."

"Yes. Very nice for both of us," said he.

"Speak for yourself, please. Why couldn't she have stayed somewhere in England?"

"Had an idea that she'd like to be with relations, and—that. I suppose I'm the only near one left to bother about her now, poor girl!"

"I know all about that," muttered the

lady. "I wish to goodness we had never left India."

"Why, you appeared to me to jump at the chance of coming on here," he returned, in a tone of feeble surprise.

"How can you say so, George?" exclaimed the lady indignantly. And her husband, unequal to the exertion of turning his head, failed to note the colour her indignation gave her.

"Strange, the *Dainty* coming up here again!" said the Consul, after a pause and refresher. "Saw a good deal of her at Kur-rachee, and now she seems likely to settle down in the Gulf."

The lady refreshened also, and answered with some briskness :

"There's nothing strange about it. She was always meant for the Gulf as you know, and there were some special reasons for not letting her go up directly she arrived last year. Besides, the Admiral told me long ago that she——; that is, I heard—— But it's no good telling you anything," she con-

cluded, finding that she was within an ace of telling him too much.

“ Didn’t know that the Admiral had told you she was to be sent here,” said her husband calmly; and he opened his eyes, and allowed a servant to bring him a cigar and to light it for him. “ Never told me so before, Julia ! ”

“ And I don’t tell you now, do I ? ”

“ Ah ! ” murmured the husband; and, having puffed at his cigar, he closed his eyes composedly.

In a few moments he exerted himself once more; calmly still, yet with a certain subdued excitement in starting a new subject: “ Wish Norris ’d come in, eh, Julia ? ”

“ Don’t care, I’m sure,” murmured the quite unconcerned Julia, extracting a fly from her liquor; and there was silence until the Political Agent obtained the victory over a too zealous mosquito. Then :

“ Good fellow, Norris,” he suggested cheerily—for is it not a pleasant thing to kill a mosquito ?

“Naval men are always better than ‘politicals,’” replied his lady wife.

“Ah!” The weary political closed his eyes once more. “Never thought you really disliked my having Edith out here,” he resumed, with prodigious effort.

“No more I do, stupid.”

“Ah!” and stupid collapsed.

“Gad, there’s Norris’ boat coming in!” he cried, after another long pause.

“Shouldn’t wonder at his coming to see us,” said Julia, in tones which undoubtedly showed her complete indifference as to whether he did or not. But one pair of continuations assumed their proper level, and the lady’s tumbler was quickly emptied and removed.

“Unless he prefers visiting the Sultan’s blind lion, or the bullocks out at the Wells,” suggested the Political Agent, with gentle facetiousness.

“He’d as soon think of visiting the Sultan’s harem as of walking out to the Wells on a hot day like this. Don’t you think so?” queried his wife, somewhat anxiously.

“Sooner, I should say, my dear,” and the Political Agent chuckled, and enjoyed this joke not a whit the less because his wife told him not to be absurd.

The *Dainty's* whaler, with Commander Norris, Carson, the Second Lieutenant, and Dr. Dogherty, ran in on the sand, and the officers were carried on the men's backs through the shallow water, and put down at the foot of the ladder reaching up to the Residency door.

Entering there, they walked across the courtyard, or ground floor, above which the flat roof of the house ran like a large gallery, leaving its centre open. Passing on to the far end of the court, around which were the offices of the Residency, they ascended by the mud and cement steps to the roof.

No one would think of living on the ground floor at Muscat, unless by reason of owning no other.

“Mrs. Elton insisted that you were going for the walk—to the Wells and back again,” laughed the Political Agent, after all had sunk into chairs.

“We thought it advisable to keep clear of the bazaar to-day,” said the Commander; “there has been no breeze to bear away its—a—spiciness. Have you ventured there yet, Mrs. Elton?”

“I’ve often been through the Indian ones, but then one can drive through them; and, besides, Indians are used to seeing English ladies. I’m afraid I couldn’t go here—unless I put on a veil, eh, George? That would be rather good fun.” Mrs. Elton looked inquiringly at her husband.

“A mask that leaves but one eye free,
To do its best in witchery,”

quoted Norris. “They give both eyes a chance here; indeed, the Muscat ‘borka’ allows one to obtain a fairly correct idea of the features behind it.”

“Too correct an idea, worse luck,” muttered Carson; “and as for features—well, I suppose they have got features, and so, for the matter of that, has our Doctor.”

“Hush!” murmured Mrs. Elton re-

provingly ; and Dogherty, who was a small man, with horse-like features, was bursting with a sudden torrent of Irish invective, when she again joined in the conversation. "Ah, you must not judge from the women you see in the bazaar, Mr. Carson ; they are the old wives and very young girls. A young married woman with any pretension to beauty would be much more completely veiled."

"Trust her brute of a husband to take care of that," muttered Carson, whilst Dogherty, returning the unexploded Irishisms into store, became all enthusiasm for the Arab beauties.

"Ah, Mrs. Elton, I suppose, now, that some of them are lovely creatures. What was that translation we read the other day of a verse by the Persian poet, Hafiz ?

Go, breeze, and gently tell
Yon fairy-limbed gazelle,
O'er mountain and through valley we follow, and are faint.
Is it the pride that glows
In the bosom of the rose
That makes her never heed the nightingale's complaint?"

“Ah! if one could watch them as they touch the soft Kanoon in the Seraglio, or join happily in the Zeraleet—the chorus of the women of the East—catch a glimpse of their wanton eyes (which ‘resemble blue water-lilies agitated by the breeze’), or see them in their robes of silvery gauze (nought but a light golden chain-work round their hair, ‘such as the maids of Yezd or Shiraz wear’), toying with their turquoises and looking-glasses like beautiful Houris, or heightening their charms with a touch of the light kohal along each eyelid.”

“*À la Jezebel*,” chimed in Carson, taking advantage of a pause. Then he murmured softly: “‘Though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair.’”

“It wasn’t Jezebel I was speaking of at all, at all,” cried the Doctor.

“Well, never mind Jezebel,” interposed Mrs. Elton, who had more than once been guilty of a similar “adjustment.” “What I

want to know is—why I shouldn't wear a veil and have a walk in the bazaar?"

"Veil would be no good alone," said the Political Agent, waking up at the prospect of his wife venturing into the town. "You'd want a pair of trousers, or bags or (whatever else the women here call them), and a cloak, and shoes. Better get the things, and have your inspection when Edith comes."

"That will not be for another week," grumbled Mrs. Elton, "and I haven't been out of the house—except to sneak down the ladder to the boat for a sail or a bathe—since we came here three months ago."

"Not lost much by that," remarked Carson, arranging a liquid mixture to his own satisfaction, after having obliged Mrs. Elton. "Appears to me that the sooner one arrives at the—well, d'ye see—'vegetable' stage, the better."

The lady laughed, looking coquettishly at Norris the while, as who should say: "I prefer making myself agreeable."

But Dogherty saw a chance to enter.

“ You take no delight in anything, Carson,” said he, more in pity than in anger.

“ Not much certainly in a dirty Arab,” was the scornful response.

“ Ye may call him dirty if ye like. It’s but skin deep for that; but to my thinking there’s something grand about a nation which has escaped the yoke of all the great monarchies of the world—the arms of Cyrus, and Pompey even, and given a religion to millions.”

“ Whatever the something grand is, it —smells,” growled Carson, waving a long tumbler beneath his nose, preparatory to making its better acquaintance.

“ The Saracens —as Gibbon calls the Arabian tribes from Mecca to the Euphrates— didn’t give ‘the million’ the option of refusing their religion, did they, Dogherty ? ” asked Norris, with a smile.

“ Old Mahomet, Omar, Ali and Co. gave it them with a Koran in one hand and a big stick in the other,” jerked out Carson.

Dogherty looked unutterable disgust, and

the expression deepened when the Political Agent sleepily proposed that they should drink in solemn silence to the memory of Mahomet's big stick.

A lengthened pause ensued, which the Doctor broke by suddenly turning to Mrs. Elton, and at the same time extracting two photographs from his pocket, which he flourished before her with an air of "here's a thing and a very pretty thing," demanding quickly: "Have ye seen me future——"

"Wife?" interrupted Carson. "Yes, we've all seen her."

"But ye haven't."

"Yes; we've seen both those—the two latest. Know them by their backs. One 'rural,' smiling pensively over a five-barred gate; the other, 'fancy,' as Irish peasant girl, with nothing remarkable save the presence of shoes and stockings and the pensive smile. We know them, don't we?" and Dogherty sadly returned his *fiancée* to his pocket, in reserve for the benefit of newer acquaintances.

Again there was a lengthened pause.

“Imagine, Mrs. Elton!” recommenced Carson, waxing wroth; “imagine a religion which advises a fellow to ‘tub’ in—well, dash it!—sand! I’m not sure that the Koran doesn’t recommend—well—holystones!”

“What day does Edith come?” asked the Commander, rather hesitatingly.

But Dogherty returned to the charge, with a tremendous outbreak of his mother tongue over Carson.

“Ye’re beside the question, ye omadhaun!” he burst forth, to that officer’s unqualified delight. “Ye’re besoide the question! The Koran it is—and well ye know it, ye spalpeen!—that permits the true belavers to use sand in the desert only, where the wather’s dry, and what they have’s for dhrinking.”

Argument after this was useless, and laughing was hot work, so Norris again asked, with great apparent unconcern, on what day Edith Elton was expected; while Dogherty moodily quaffed his liquor and wondered what on earth the fools had seen to laugh

at, more especially that “red-headed old toper” who was for ever making eyes at the skipper. This was hard upon Mrs. E., for her hair was scarcely to be called red, neither was she old, except from a girlish point of view. It’s true that she had taken to—I should say, “had fallen into Anglo-Indian ways,” and did look towards Captain Norris more frequently after the fourth “peg” than was altogether—— But a toper? Who but a wild Irishman could possibly associate such an idea with a by-no-means bad-looking woman of eight-and-twenty? “She’s delicate,” her husband would say, “and from eating really nothing requires plenty of other nourishment, poor thing! Soda, and—that.”

It was often a moot question what the Political Agent’s “and—that,” might mean; but in this case there could be no doubt “that” meant *whiskey*.

“Edith arrives in another week, Captain Norris.” Mrs. Elton gave the news gently, sliding her chair a little back from the group,

and adding in a low, chaffing tone, "will you tell Mr. Daymon or shall I ? "

" Why should I not tell him ? " returned Norris impatiently, his voice raised so that all the world might hear.

But " all the world " had other occupation than listening, and the lady's voice murmured again with a little, quick sigh to enforce its tenderness : " Oh, as you like, of course, Jack."

The familiar " Jack " came very softly. Mrs. Elton's fourth " peg " was effervescent.

" You can tell him," decided the Commander. " I might prove myself an old fool, even now."

" That's past and forgotten long ago," whispered Mrs. Elton ; and she glanced quickly from him towards where the others stood arguing with an Arab who had brought " banduks " and " jambeers " from the bazaar for sale. " An infatuation for a school girl," she continued half-banteringly, but watching his face as she spoke ; " a school girl who had fallen in love with her playmate, Ernie

Daymon, even before she had let down the first tuck of her frocks. Of course it's forgotten."

"I wish you could always make me think so, Julia." The Commander's regretful tone brought a frown to Mrs. Elton's face, but she whispered back coquettishly, touching his arm with her fan: "And do I not *now*, Jack?"

"Yes, yes, I suppose so." But he barely returned her glance, and she threw herself further back in the long arm-chair as he turned to call for Mirza—the *Dainty's* Interpreter.

At the Commander's call the Interpreter brought forward the seller of Arab guns and daggers, pushed him and his weapons into a prominent position, then as quickly showing him out of it again, proceeded to expatiate upon his wares himself.

Aboul Mirza is a good-looking Persian of—as near as he can determine—thirty years of age. A thick black moustache is the only hair upon his face, for, though married—pro-

bably to the limit of Mahomet's allowance—that is to four wives—Aboul is a dandy still, and will not grow his beard and settle down into respectable family ways. In height about five feet five inches, in his turban and long cloak he looks—as Persians and Arabs always do—quite four inches taller. The small embroidered kolah, or Persian cap, is pushed well down over his skull and is just visible through the red and yellow-striped silk which encircles it, which is folded with great care to form a particularly rakish turban, cocked jauntily on one side of his head, its many-coloured fringe hanging over his shoulder. A long white overskirt—with many small buttons and embroidered pocket-holes on its breast, and a cummerbund, or sash, of similar colour to the turban, folded around the waist—is his principal garment. For Aboul is a Bushiree or native of Bushire, the principal seaport and refuge of scoundrels along the coast—although Aboul would scarcely admit that—and seldom wears his flowing cloak of dark green silk with gold

embroidered collar, or his ditto of light green—the colour of the followers of Ali, Mahomet's nephew—with red-lined sleeves, except to visit the coffee shops of his native town, or to celebrate, wherever he may be, the feast of Mohurrum. With the long white overskirt the Persian costume ends, and a pair of ordinary white trousers, striped stockings, and patent-leather shoes complete his toilet, and vouch for his love of the English. Of ornaments, which he would never forgive our overlooking, he has several. A massive gold chain stretches across his breast, and several rings encircle his fingers, conspicuous amongst them being the usual band of silver with egg-shaped turquoise, the favourite stone of Arabs and Persians alike. Notwithstanding his supposed love for the English, he is not to be trusted in any degree more than the surrounding Arabs; indeed, rather less; for like most Persians he is of the Shia sect, from whom sprang "the assassins," and believes in their doctrine of "guarding oneself," according to which, the

Shia, in order to avoid persecution, may publicly profess any opinions he pleases. He may deny any or all of the special doctrines of his sect ; he may profess himself to be an orthodox Mahomedan ; nay, he may even curse the twelve Imans, and yet be considered blameless ? Taking which charming doctrine into consideration, we arrive at the natural conclusion that however "blameless" Aboul Mirza may be, yet is he, as before stated, not to be trusted.

After a preliminary salute, which was a cross between an eastern salaam and a regulation pull of the forelock, he proceeded to complete a bargain with the native.

"You see this Arab man, sir?" said he, addressing the Commander, and nodding scornfully towards the particularly sullen and quite ordinarily dirty Arab. "This man he say he buy everything from one other man. He say that other man not take less than one hundred rupees for jambeer. I tell him you give fifty rupees, sir ?"

The Commander nodded, and Aboul made

a snatch at the daggers, selected the best, and proceeded to count out fifty rupees, keeping up a torrent of Arabic of an abusive nature. After listening for some few minutes, the stolid Arab appeared to think it worth his while to remonstrate gravely.

“What’s he say ?” asked Carson.

“He say Sultan’s soldier sell jambeer to him for one hundred rupees ; so he never make money from Captain at all.”

“Does it from love ! *pure* love ! D’ye hear that, Dogherty ? Noble creature !”

But the Doctor had seized the present opportunity to show Mrs. Elton the very latest photo of his “future wife ;” and Aboul Mirza proceeded to express his opinion that the stolid one was the son of an unbelieving mother, and had “gained” the weapons for himself. “All the same as you call ‘stole ‘em,’” concluded Aboul, proudly and comprehensively.

“‘Gained’ sounds prettier,” laughed the Commander, “and is more in keeping with majesty, isn’t it, Doctor ? But do His

Majesty's body-guard dispose of their arms whenever they think proper?"

"You like, sir! What you give, you give. Suppose he make one rupee, he sell."

"The arms and deserts of the Arabs are the safeguards of their what you call freedom.' Isn't that it, Hakim?" inquired Carson, chuckling.

Dogherty, who was often addressed as the Hakim, or Doctor—vouchsafed no reply; and Aboul, having apparently succeeded in persuading the Arab that he was a thief, gave him forty rupees for his jambeer, and promptly hustled him off.

"Be easy with him, Aboul, easy!" cried the Commander.

"What for 'easy,' Sahib?" demanded the panting interpreter, as the Arab hurriedly disappeared off the roof. "I know that Arab man! He the Sultan's man himself!"

"Then his weapons were a choice assortment collected from the Sultan's guard?"

The Interpreter nodded and laughed maliciously. "That fool think I never tell

Captain," said he, and then he added, as an afterthought, "that fool ! he marry my sister."

" You are not a too affectionate brother-in-law," said Mrs. Elton, laughing boisterously, and watching Aboul with some curiosity.

" Persian man not 'brother law,'" muttered the Interpreter, always sulky when an expression was used which he could not understand.

" I always tell Captain everything," he continued, turning his back upon Mrs. Elton who, being a woman, held a very low place in his estimation, " and that man, the gray-eyed son of an Arab Jew !—he say, suppose I tell Captain to give him one hundred rupees, he give me eight annas backsheesh. My God ! he offer me eight annas !" The tone of virtuous indignation was perfect; but Aboul's disgust at having failed to make capital out of the transaction overreached his prudence, and he concluded angrily, " only eight annas for one hundred rupees ! The Jew ! and he marry my sister ! "

Mrs. Elton regarded the Interpreter with

increased interest, and everyone laughed, though the Commander tried to speak indignantly. "You scoundrel!" said he. "If your precious relative had offered you a few rupees backsheesh instead of 'only eight annas,' he might have fleeced me to any extent! Eh?"

"'Llah! [Captain sahib only joking now!]" said Aboul deprecatingly. "He know that I never take the backsheesh. He know I never do that sort of thing."

"I know that you'd take or steal anything you could safely lay your hands upon, you villain!" laughed Norris. "Tell my coxswain to get the boat in. Might as well expect to find a pebble upon the muddy shores of the Gulf, as a truthful Persian! And how can you expect anything else?" he added, turning to Mrs. Elton, "when one of the traditions of Mahomet himself says that there are three lies which the recording angel will except, 'a lie told in order to reconcile two men; a lying promise made by a man to his wife; and

a lie in which a man engaged in war makes a promise or threat.' That's something on the principle of 'all's fair in love or war.' Eh ?"

" Persian man he no good ! always, no good ?" said Aboul, with evident sincerity, as he made his escape ; swaggering none the less because of his self-condemnation.

" Are none of you going to stop to dinner ? George, why don't you insist upon their stopping ?"

Mr. Elton looked up inquiringly at the Commander, as his wife spoke.

" Thank you, not to-night," said Norris. " The mail closes at daylight to-morrow, and there will be no chance of writing home again for a fortnight."

And both Carson and Dogherty murmured their excuses for that evening.

" But you promised me yesterday, Captain Norris !"

In making this assertion Mrs. Elton was the sport of fancy, or of " pegging." She often was so.

“Please excuse me ; I must have forgotten the mail then,” replied Norris. And Mrs. Elton said no more until she stood with him a short distance apart from the rest, at the top of the ladder.

I have mentioned that she was a by-no-means bad-looking woman. I can go further, and say that at such times—frequent of late—as the colour deepened on her cheeks, the brilliancy in her eyes, she would have been accounted good-looking even amongst Europeans ; whilst, at Muscat—the sole white woman, and unveiled—her face became “a type of beauty,” to every right-thinking Englishman. To add that she was eight-and-twenty, and knew her power, would simply be labelling her “dangerous,” so I add nothing.

She stood in silence watching the boat being hauled close in on the beach, and after a moment or two, Norris spoke.

“I really ought to go on board to-night, Julia !”

His tone was undecided and regretful

already ; and she raised her eyes for a moment to his.

“ Of course you should ! I know, Jack.”
And the eyelids dropped again.

“ I might go off the first thing in the morning, and finish my letters then ! ” said the Commander reflectively.

Mrs. Elton looked up again—brightly now. “ Captain Norris will stay, George,” she called to her husband ; and a few whispered words reached the Commander’s ear alone.

“ Persuaded him, have you ? ” said the Political Agent.

“ Wonderful woman, isn’t she, Norris ? So delicate, and yet so energetic, and—and——”

“ Quite so,” said the Commander.

“ And—and—that,” concluded the Political Agent.

“ Exactly.” So the Commander stopped.

CHAPTER II.

A MONTH has passed since that evening, and three weeks ago Edith Elton arrived from England to live with her uncle and guardian at the Residency, Muscat. With two English ladies to visit in the Arab city, a number rarely before reached, never exceeded, the *Dainties*' trips to the shore have been numerous ; and many have been the dinners upon the roof of the Residency, and the poop of the man-of-war. Alone, of the officers, the Commander has become more quiet, and tries to hold himself aloof from the mild festivities. Since Edith's arrival too, one of the fits of anger—so frequent during the voyage from England—has seized him again, and once more Daymon was the object. But, unlike the earlier out-

bursts, it was over in a moment, and he and Daymon are friends again. Edith, he treats—much to her disgust—as though he were determined to forget that they were ever, as she had described it, chums; and, as equally determined to remember that he is forty, she, not quite eighteen.

Daymon and Edith are as noisy friends, and have as frequent rows as in the old Plympton days. Indeed, Edith is, if anything, more ready to “check Master Ernie’s impertinence,” as she has it, for Captain Norris has lately taken upon himself the office of mediator, and Edith finds his mediation pleasant; whilst Daymon, wondering much at the Commander’s way of making love, wonders still more at the arrangements which seem invariably made to leave Edith and himself together.

Luckily, Edith is never tired of listening to the praises of his far-off loved one—at least he thinks she is not; but there is something odd in the Commander’s lately assumed paternal tone, and often has he tried to persuade her to

absolve him from his promise of secrecy, and to allow him "just to hint to Norris, who isn't half a bad sort of fellow, you know," the state of her feelings.

Need we say that Edith has been determined, obstinate, mulish ? Fancy, one man "just hinting" to another the delicate feeling that other has awakened in the breast of a mutual female friend—not if Edith knows it. And she may be mulish or anything else that Ernie likes to call her, but that's her business, and he has nothing whatever to do with it. Whereat Ernie cavils, and one of the quarrels—lovers' quarrels, Captain Norris thinks them, he has so little experience—commences.

And Mrs. Elton still laughs freely. Playing a game, which, to an unscrupulous woman, is by no means an easy one, which, to all other women, would be impossible. The flush is oftener upon her cheek now; and Norris holds more and more aloof, disgusted, though little she guesses it, at her after-dinner laugh, her undisguised contempt for her husband, and, most of all, her unconcealed admiration

for himself ; whilst every evening as her laugh grows louder, the Residency Surgeon, speaking but seldom, watches her with a pained, wondering look, until, unable to bear watching longer, he steals silently away from the noisy house-top, down the dark steps to the big-gates, and walks by the light of a lantern through the deserted streets to the bachelor's roof, which for twelve years has been his home. He had known her in England in the old days, and, as she told her husband when they met unexpectedly at Muscat, "they had been quite old cronies."

But for the last twenty-four hours noise and active quarrelling have ceased, and a steady sulkiness has settled over all—a sulkiness which began with the first burning gust, and will remain until the last burning breath of the dry, hot wind.

H.M.S. *Dainty*, her white hull gleaming brightly in the moonlight, lies across the Gap, and so close in shore that the shadows of her masts reach the edge of the rocks of Muscat Island. But the pleasant breeze which has

so often brought life and energy from the East, died away just those twenty-four hours ago, and in its stead, straight from the deserts and barren rocks of Irak, came the burning north-wester, rippling the water with its million cat's-paws, fanning the skin with its fiery breath, until the dry lip cracked, and the eye seemed scorched in its thirsty socket.

Midnight now, yet the thermometer stands at 108 degrees !

Along both sides of the *Dainty's* little poop are officers' mats, and stretched upon them—some with limbs thrown loosely apart, others covered entirely by their blankets, preferring to be melted or smothered to being baked—are the officers themselves.

Captain Norris and Daymon lie close alongside one another, each flat upon his back, and vainly endeavouring to sleep.

The Commander has grown a beard since he came out, and looks his age now—a handsome, powerful man near the very prime of life.

Daymon's face, clean-shaven except at the

short, close-cropped tufts of whiskers, shows at a glance the twelve years' advantage he has over his chief. His limbs are slight, and his face, in its sailorly cleanliness, wears a pleasant expression even as he raises himself for the hundredth time to take a short pull at the water-cooler hanging from the rail beside him.

Doctor Dogherty is on the opposite side of the poop, pretending to be comfortably asleep, in reality suffering the tortures of the parched ; suffering without a gasp, rather than show dislike to anything Arabian.

Next to the Doctor, his round, good-humoured face and sturdy body completely enveloped in a blanket, is Carson. At intervals a hand protrudes in search of the indispensable, then the head emerges, nods scornfully towards the shamming Hakim, obtains refreshment for the Carson body at a gulp, and quickly retreats. Between the intervals a succession of "dash its!" and other short prayers, more or less embracing—not too fondly—the state of the weather, are distinctly audible outside the blanket.

Near at hand, occasionally echoing his messmate's sentiments, oftener seeking relief in yet more heated and sweeping condemnation, is Ellis, the Chief Engineer; and the perpetual gurgle of water from the farther corners of the poop answers sufficiently for the restless condition of the three other officers.

So for a couple of hours more the groans and execrations, the gurglings and growls, continue; the voices of the Arab look-out men grow harsher, and sleep seems farther off than ever. Then, sudden as welcome, comes the change; and with a sigh of relief each one turns upon his side. Old Ellis ceases to imprecate; Carson kicks off his blanket, as he expresses the general feeling that "there's balm in—well, dash it—Gilead; corn in—well, dash it—Egypt;" and in five minutes on the poop resounds the grateful snore, proclaiming that the wind has shifted to the eastward.

Lightly through the Gap the cool breeze plays upon the sleepers, until the star of

Egypt, the brilliant Canopus, grows dim, the day breaks, and presently man's greatest enemy in the Gulf—the sun—creeps slowly up into the cloudless sky. Slowly creeps, until he tops the rugged peaks of Muscat Island, and at a little after six o'clock throws his burning rays upon the deck of the *Dainty*. No escape from this enemy upon the poop. Retirement below is the only course, and, gaping wearily, the *Dainties* prepare to flit.

“Another fine morning,” observed the Hakim, in a tone of cheerful conviction, as he stood erect in a checker-sided suit of pyjamas. “Fresh smells the shore of Araby,” he gently quoted, trying to look as though he believed it. Then, “Another fine”—morning, he would probably have repeated; but the swift approach of Carson’s slipper just then attracted all his attention, whilst Daymon’s voice finished the sentence with “fusty smell.”

And, indeed, an aroma suggestive of fustiness was stealing towards them from the habitat of the Muscattee!

The Doctor had made his remark con-

cerning the state of the weather before, and would probably—should he remain at Muscat—have an opportunity of repeating it on about three hundred and sixty-four mornings in the year. He had made it before ; and though a light blue sky, a rising sun, and a gentle breeze undoubtedly help to constitute a “fine morning,” yet are there degrees of fineness ; and when the “light blue sky” contains not the vestige of a cloud, when the “rising sun” burns fiercely as it rises, and the “gentle breeze” seems to have a difficulty in breathing, and a doubt as to whether, after all, its life is worth living—then, I submit, an unpleasant degree of fineness has been reached.

Carson and Daymon felt very much the same ; hence their respective objections.

“Don’t forget to put it in the Journal, Doctor.”

A glance of scorn was Dogherty’s sole response. That Journal—referred to in Daymon’s slighting tones—was the motive-power of his life ! In search of incidents to enter in that Journal, he would risk sunstrokes, heal

apoplexies and fevers ; repaid for any misery, glad of any unpleasantness, so that he might “put it in the Journal.” Without that Journal’s stimulus he might have remained an ordinary, a very ordinary man ; with it, he was ready to become at any moment a Fenian, a Molly Maguire, ay, and even a Land Leaguer, for could he not “put it in the Journal ?” Not for him the oft repeated question : “What will the world say ?” He required a higher standard : “How will it look in the Journal ?”

It was a large and rapidly-growing work, and it contained everything that in any way affected him ; from his highest hopes and most perilous actions, to the direction of the wind and the temperature of the atmosphere at the moment which hailed their birth. Written at mysterious hours, guarded by patent locks, his messmates might strive to master its contents in vain. “Hence,” to quote the words of the journalist himself, “the slighting remarks of those poor devils of outsiders.”

“Hulloh !” cried Daymon, as they all

stood leaning over the poop rails, gazing for the most part at the densely-packed shoals of fish, large and small, each in their relative armies, which now twisted and turned in wall-like masses fathoms down in the blue, limpid water ; and then lay almost motionless close to its surface, looking like nothing so much as the dark green fields of weed in some disused canal ; unless, perhaps, it might be, a “take” of pilchards off St. Ives or Mount’s Bay in autumn. “Hulloh ! The Sultan has a tomasha, or levée, perhaps one should call it, on again. Look at the swaggering fusty ones paying their respects ! ”

With no undue haste—except on the part of the Doctor, the exciting contemplation of the finny tribe was given up for the present, and all eyes turned towards the rough wooden verandah in front of the Palace which was the scene of an imposing (?) ceremony.

The Sultan himself—Seyed Abdhul bin Said, we’ll call him—a tall, gray-haired man—Al Arab al Ariba, or a pure Arab—with handsome, aquiline features, and a skin but

slightly tanned by the sun, is seated upon his variegated cushions at the far end of the matted floor; his cigarette between his teeth, chibouk and narghilli near at hand if required.

A small “doll’s house” sort of cup, destitute of handle, containing a teaspoonful of bitter Arab coffee, is occasionally replenished from the conically-shaped Arab coffee-pot held in readiness by His Majesty’s white-shirted, black domestic slave. A present, the latter, from the Sultan of Zanzibar to his elder brother and Suzerain, the Sultan of Muscat.

One of Sultan Abdhul’s sons is seated by his side, though at a respectful distance; and along the wall, some on the small and dingy Persian carpet, others beyond the pale of even that amount of luxury, sit, squatted on their heels, the Ministers of Muscat, the Governor of Al Mattrah, and the Sheikhs of some of the smaller villages near, who have not yet obtained power sufficient to enable them to laugh at the beard of the descendant of the ancient Imams of all Oman.

“‘How are the mighty fallen!’” murmured the Doctor in tones of deep emotion, as through his glass he observed Jassim, the Navy Contractor, and Aboul Mirza, the Interpreter, stalk, with as majestic a swagger as the biggest Sheikh in Oman, through the assembled potentates, and, salaaming to the Sultan, squat against the wall, prepared to drink their coffee: and, on the Persian principle that “coffee without tobacco is meat without salt,” to smoke their cigarettes, whilst discussing the news of the previous day.

“For three hundred years,” continued Dogherty, in sadness rather than anger, “that man’s ancestors have ruled in Oman. Ruled over a dominion of which no maps exist; of which no one can define the exact boundaries. And now—now——!” A few fierce words succeeded. Then his voice became unintelligible. The Doctor had disguised himself in Irish.

“Now, dash it, now!” echoed Carson. “What about now? Abdhul is a ’cuter fellow than most of his known ancestors; and I

suppose that, as usual, their name is legion, though they did 'sway the main' more, and rule over a country, fit—as someone beautifully puts it—'fit for Arabs, and no other people.' Through his departed relatives, the Muscat Arabs earned the distinction of being the first pirates of the Gulf, and those same departed ones bequeathed a term of contempt for their descendants to the whole Arab nation, which, being interpreted, is, 'as great a coward as a Muscattee.' That's what his ancestors have done; but old Abdhul knows a trick worth any amount of—well, dash it!—piracies. He goes in for British protection and—what ye call—allowances. Ha, ha!"

The Doctor answered never a word, but he slowly gathered up his pyjamas and went below to his Journal, in which he made the following entry: "The history of Muscat bears a striking resemblance in many respects to that of my own down-trodden, unhappy land. In each the ancient chieftains appear to have been animated by a similar free, open spirit, yet both would have come to utter ruin

had it not been for the protection of——
However, that is, of course, uncertain. Down with the oppressors of old Ireland ! Wind, calm ; temperature, 93 degrees.”

The Commander, who had been standing a little apart from the others, now joined them. “The Residency boat is being got ready, I see. We shall have the ladies afloat before long, and one of them is not used to ‘morning dress’ yet.”

He laughed, and looked at the gentlemen’s sleeping suits, leaning gracefully around, then made for his cabin to put on a white tunic.

“By Gad, how he’s improved !” said Carson to Daymon, as they went below to do the same. “Still breaks out now and then, though.”

“Oh, very seldom now,” said Daymon, the good-natured. “And think how slow he must generally find it.”

They were soon presentable, and came on deck again that they might exchange a word or two with Mrs. Elton and Edith, as they passed the ship on their way to bathe in one

of the small creeks well under the shadow of Muscat Island. The officers themselves would bathe in the shadow of the ship, after the ladies had passed.

In a very few minutes the boat left the Residency, and at the same time a canoe came alongside the port gangway with fresh meat, vegetables, and bananas; Jassim, the Contractor, and Aboul Mirza lolling lazily upon the mat in the bottom of the boat.

"Ah, Jassim! good-morning," said Daymon, as the Contractor came aft, Aboul Mirza keeping slightly in rear.

"Salaam, number one, sir"—the First Lieutenant was always 'number one.' "No very well this 'good-morning.'"

Jassim spoke in melancholy accents, and shook his head and slackened his girdle, as was his general custom. He was a man of cadaverous aspect, and he suffered from a chronic stomach-ache, which, oddly enough, beer alone could alleviate. His long cloak was of navy blue cloth, plentifully embroidered and fringed; for Jassim was a haughty man—

a Beloochee Arab, proud of a pedigree which was as long—well, as long as only a Beloochee's could be.

“ Been drinking too much of the Sultan's saffron, eh, ye old villain ? ” said the First Lieutenant.

Jassim shook his head. “ Inshallah ! God, He knows. I pray God day and night for you and your dear messman's. I pray—— ”

“ Yes ; all right, Jassim. We know all about that. It's very kind of you. You'll have a bottle of beer, eh ? ”

“ You please, number one. You God's man,” said Jassim, with religious fervour, and brightening considerably. “ S'pose I not feel well ; you God's man. You give bottley beer ; and I pray—pray ; always I pray for you.” And Mr. Jassim started hastily in search of the ward-room steward, and his well-beloved “ bottley beer.”

“ How about those dates ? Has the Prince of Wales sent out ‘ one chit ’ yet ? ”

The Contractor stopped short, and his keen black eyes flashed inquiringly at Daymon, but

immediately fell again, and the—what shall we call it?—the predestination, the kismet, or, to put it more clearly, the “don’t-care-a-hang” expression noticeable in most Mahomedans, settled once more on his face. He was beginning to fear that those terrible Ingraisee jokers, who hid his sandals when he left them at the ward-room door, and often slapped him on the back by way, as their wit had it, of drawing-out the Contractor, were now, as regarded those dates, venting for him the sniff of scorn, curling for him the lip of derision.

When the ship had arrived at Muscat in the preceding year, her Paymaster had gone home, appointed to one of the Royal yachts, and Jassim, on the recommendation of Carson, also of that homeward-bound Paymaster, had forwarded by the latter a box of dates for “The Prince of Wales, with Jassim bin Mubarruk’s salaam.”

Carson had impressed upon him that the very least return the Prince could make would be to send him one “chit,” appointing Jassim

bin Mubarruk and his family hereditary grand contractors for the British Navy.

Jassim had asserted indignantly that "Beloochée man never take backsheesh for a present;" but, as time rolled on, bringing no "piece of paper," he had grown melancholy. He no longer stood with open mouth gazing upon the picture of the Prince which hung in the *Dainty's* mess, and instead of the admiring, "He's God's man; he number one man; he my very good friend," with which he had invariably greeted it, he now shook his head despondently, and his hand instinctively sought his encircling cummerbund, telling that that Beloochée man reflected sadly where those dates might have gone.

On one occasion, indeed, when the day's method of drawing the Contractor had taken the form of plentiful relays of beer, he had not only changed the style of his greeting to, "That man no good; he all same as Shaithân," but was with difficulty prevented from damaging the luxuriant beard of his sometime "good friend."

Since that occasion, and the terrible "touch of the sun" which followed it next morning, dates have been a sore subject with Jassim ; and now, murmuring, "Ah ! you laugh ! Never mind ; God, He pay," he once more started off.

"Here comes the Residency boat!" cried Daymon, jumping on the poop, followed more slowly by Carson, who never did his limbs the injustice of straining them unnecessarily.

The Commander came to his cabin door, but there stopped ; and, calling to Daymon to give his love to the ladies, turned back. Once inside the cabin again, he watched the approach of the boat from one of his side ports ; watched it draw near the ship ; watched it pass astern and pull on for the small creek. Then, with an impatient sigh, he moved away and commenced to dress.

"How d'you do, Mrs. Elton ? What cheer, Edith ?" sang out Daymon's clear voice.

The boat's crew lay on their oars under the stern ; and both ladies expressed a belief that, considering the misery of the

earlier part of the past night, they were fairly well.

“But how you poor creatures managed to exist with no cooled rooms to creep into, is beyond me to imagine!” added Edith, unable to restrain a compassionate look at the only portion of Carson which that officer’s keen sense of justice had permitted to surmount the ship’s side—his round, red face.

“Oh, not at all,” said he. “I didn’t find it hot; rather the contrary. Mustn’t believe all that those fellows tell you in books about hot winds. I had a blanket on all night, and quite enjoyed it; quite—well, dash it! Enjoyed it.”

“Ah, ha! Thing is to believe it!” cried Edith, quoting one of his favourite expressions; and she leant back in the boat laughing merrily.

“You are rude, Miss Elton,” retorted Carson. “Rude as a lady-purchaser in a Co-operative store;” and he too chuckled merrily.

“I hope Captain Norris is well,” said Mrs. Elton, in a tone which distinctly implied that

if he was he ought not to be ; for what but ill-health could excuse his absence ? And she had on a new morning dress of the colour he loved.

Edith glanced hastily at Daymon ; she had no fear of him, he knew her secret. Then, as she saw by his face that there was no occasion to disturb herself about the Commander's health, she coloured a little, and said carelessly : "Of course he's well, Julia ; who ever heard of Captain Norris being ill ?"

Mrs. Elton was quite satisfied ; charmed to hear it.

" We shall be ready for our masked walk this evening," said she. " Will nothing make Jack forget that little chit of a girl ?" she thought. And the boat rowed on ; whilst within the Captain's cabin Norris restlessly paced the deck. " Of course he's well," he repeated, bitterly ; " who ever heard of Captain Norris being ill ? 'Or who ever cared either way ?' she might have added. ' Ah ! what a fool I was ! And yet, had it not been for Daymon—— !'"

He tramped on silently for a few moments, thinking deeply. "Again! again! Have I no command over myself?" Abruptly ceasing his tramp he hurried on deck, weary more than ever of his enforced solitude, impatient and ashamed of the thoughts the solitude brought.

Daymon leant over the taffrail watching the Residency boat. A little apart stood the interpreter, with folded arms, a leer upon his face, watching Daymon. The boat passed on out of sight; the Interpreter noiselessly moved a pace forward. "You marry that woman, Sahib?"

Daymon started. The Interpreter's sly whisper and leer brought his thoughts back to Muscat. After the boat had passed on he had in fancy wandered far away. The months since leaving England had never been lived; the miles of separation had never been travelled; and again he pressed to his heart a sobbing, half-frightened girl, who promised to be true and to wait.

The Interpreter spoke again: "Ah, you

not tell me, sir ! Never mind. Allah ! But she is beautiful as Leila, as the eyes of Ali ! Lovely, all same as the lotus, and with voice of Israfil ! And young, too, for Englishwoman ! Ah, yes ! Young ; like those black-eyed girls we call Houris, who wait for good Mahomedans, and——”

“ Oh, hang your black-eyed girls ! ” interrupted Daymon ; whilst Carson, who had caught part of Aboul’s remark, laughed at his having, as he thought, guessed the First Lieutenant’s secret. He remembered Mrs. Elton telling him, only a day or two before, how pleased she was to see that Mr. Daymon and dear Edith were so attached to one another, and that she thought it would be a capital match.

He remembered too that he had committed himself to a similar opinion, and had from that time felt an intense pity for poor Daymon, so soon to be held in matrimonial bondage.

“ What a fellow that Mahomet was ! ” said he half-admiringly. “ He knew his business and the fellows he had to deal with.”

“‘The reward of them shall be Paradise, gardens of eternal abode,’” murmured Aboul in sanctified tones.

“Put it into plain language, you scoundrel! Four wives for all his followers here, and unlimited black-eyed Polls hereafter. Eh ?”

“Koran says you like four women—all right; but better only have one woman.”

“The gay Prophet didn’t draw the line at any number for himself. I suppose he gave himself—well, dash it—dispensation !”

“I not know that name you ‘dash,’” muttered Aboul, turning sulky, not because he feared that Islam was being laughed at, but because “dispensation” was not in his vocabulary.

“‘They are a garment unto you, and ye are a garment unto them,’” he murmured in another moment, quoting the verse of the Koran which describes the comfort a man and his wife find in one another.

“Considering the number of ‘garments’ Mahomet took unto himself, he might have thriven as an old clo’ man,” laughed Daymon,

looking expectantly at the Doctor, who was now listening.

“He must have been a large landed proprietor anyhow,” resumed Carson, in a tone which challenged Dogherty to deny it if he dared; “or he ought to have been, provided one of his statements in the Koran is correct —‘your wives are your tillage.’”

Dogherty said nothing. He had read the verse referred to, and he sauntered quite carelessly away.

Carson, in wild delight at having discomfited him, yelled out: “I say, Hakim, don’t think much of the man who added a chapter to his Koran on purpose to justify his amour with Mary, the Coptic maiden. Eh ?”

Still quite carelessly the Hakim sauntered towards the hatchway leading below.

“Perhaps,” insinuated Carson in yet louder tones, the Commander and Daymon laughing heartily, “perhaps the shoulder-bones of mutton on which, according to Gibbon, ‘the word of God and of the apostle was diligently

recorded by his disciples,' got mixed somehow ; and it was not the Prophet, but one of the recording disciples, who deceived that maidenly Copt. Possibly they were altered by some device of Shaithân, the Evil One, or possibly——”

But with a howl of genuine Irish the Doctor disappeared down the hatchway.

Officers and men bathed before exercising for an hour at general quarters ; then, through the intense mid-day heat, all who could, slept, the necessary routine work being left as far as was possible until the evening.

At five o'clock that afternoon, the Commander with Mrs. Elton, and Carson with Miss Elton, Blunt and Aboul Mirza bringing up the rear, sallied forth from the huge wooden gates of the Residency, the ladies being completely masked and clothed in the long blue cloaks and yellow shoes of the Arab women.

The Muscattees were not likely to care much whether white women went into the bazaars or not, so that here a disguise was

more a matter of joke than precaution ; but in many places round the Gulf a Frankish woman's face would create unpleasant excitement.

Through the dusty, uneven roads—so narrow, that between the walls and the houses, which, like everything else in Muscat, seemed to be crumbling away, two people could scarcely walk abreast ; so numerous, that a walk meant a series of sharp turns—the party moved towards the corner of the city where was the bazaar.

A naked small boy, ditto girl, and several half-starved Pariah dogs bolted round corners or through half-opened wooden doors ; half-a-dozen jungle cats spat from as many flat house-tops, and a few women drew their cloaks doubly close, and cowered against the walls on the approach of the white men. The rest of Muscat life was to be found in the bazaar.

“ You two ladies had better walk together,” said Norris, as an additional odour of ghee, attar of roses, and over-ripe fruit, warned

them that they were nearing their destination. "Women do not walk with the men in this benighted country; and imagine the disgust of the followers of Islam at seeing two of their women walking with the moon-faced Christians!"

"Very hard on the men, isn't it, Mr. Carson? Good-bye," and Edith trotted on—much too prettily for a genuine Arab maiden—and joined Mrs. Elton, whilst the Commander fell back to Carson.

They are soon in all the fun of the fair. Up the Gulf, at Bushire, or Bahrun, for example, the bazaar streets are arranged according to the trades; shoemsmiths, armourers, tin and silversmiths have their respective quarters; but in Muscat there is no room for like order.

A fat Banian, naked to the waist—or where it should be—squats on the ledge of his "hole in the wall," smokes his cigarette, and smiles blandly—for are they not fellow-subjects of the Great Queen?—as the Englishmen glance towards his assortment of variegated

turbans, veils, shawls, etc. Here, too, the veiled ladies linger.

An attenuated Arab, yet more naked, squats in his "hole in the wall," and smokes his cocoa-nut "hubble-bubble," not caring a single "bismillah" whether the Englishmen glance at his fly-covered dates and hulwah, or leave it alone. A few Arab friends from neighbouring holes—all apparently equally innocent of any desire for custom, its cares and troubles—are solemnly waiting their turn for "a draw," two or three of them whiling away the time by afternoon prayer. It is not difficult for the Arab to find time for his five prayers daily; neither has he far to go for a place of worship. It is easy, too, to determine the amount of spiritual comfort he derives from prayer to a God whom he believes to have pre-arranged his every thought and action, and noted it in the "preserved table" standing before His throne—for does not the "Tradition" say: "There is not one amongst you whose sitting-place is not written by God, whether in the fire or in Paradise"? A

Sonnite spreads his mat in the middle of the road, crosses his arms upon his breast, makes his genuflexions, and curses the scandalous Shiah, who—may his grave be defiled!—has spread his mat also in the middle of the road, and, dropping his hands to his side, makes his genuflexions, cursing the reprobate Sonnite, whose grave may dogs destroy!

Each is agreed upon one point, namely, that to make his prayer of the slightest avail, his nose at each prostration must be “lightly rubbed in the mud,” unless—mark the “Tradition”—the person praying “has a sore place on the top of his nose.”

Major Osborn, in his interesting volume on “Islam under the Khalifs of Bagdad,” tells a story, which shows, ridiculously enough, the Mahomedan belief in forms and ceremonies.

“I asked Ayesha,” says Al Harith, one of the early Moslems, “did the Prophet read the Koran at night loud or low?” She said: “Sometimes loud; at other times, in a low tone of voice.” “Allah to Akbar!” shouted the delighted inquirer. “Praise be to God,

who has made religion so spacious and unconfin'd!"

Another story, told by the same author, shows the amount of consolation found in their new religion by some of the earliest and most pious believers.

"Yez'd Rakashi entered one day into the presence of the Khalif Omar ibn Abd al Azig, who requested of him some pious consolation. 'O prince of Believers!' said Yez'd, 'know that thou art not the first Khalif who must die.'

"Omar wept and said: 'Speak on.'

"Yez'd continued: 'O prince of Believers, between you and Adam there has not been one who did not descend with swiftness into the grave.'

"Omar wept and said: 'Speak on.'

"'O prince of Believers, betwixt thee and Paradise, as betwixt thee and Hell, there is no resting-place.'

"When Omar heard these words he fell to the ground senseless."

So much for pious consolation through Islam.

Mrs. Elton and Edith struggle obstinately on. Running against them in front, pushing from behind, screaming overhead and crawling underfoot are Arab children—round-bellied, naked, and noisy. A lean goat butts at them in front, a lean cow urges them on in rear. Small Arab women masked, big Seedie women, and sometimes a little Beloochee, unmasked, retaining the custom of her country—get out of the way. This is their one redeeming feature: their mankind will—to put it mildly—see you in the mud first. Everywhere flies sufficient for a plague of Egypt! everywhere a smell that can be felt.

Still Mrs. Elton and Edith struggled obstinately, womanfully on. The former once turning indignantly upon a dropsical Arab who had casually knocked out the ashes of his chibouk against her shoulder; the latter once exciting the surprise of the bystanders—which luckily subsided when they found it was “only a woman”—by shrieking faintly, at the sight of two or three criminals, with hands cut off, begging at the gates.

Once outside the walls, and clear of the city, they jogged along comfortably enough over the stones and past the mud and cement huts with their reed enclosures. Here, a woman or two, none too handsome, and none too young, might be seen blowing into the charcoal pit, or smoking the hubble-bubble, whilst their lords and masters were away from home; and here, a donkey loaded to the ears, an Arab, armed to the teeth, passed towards the city.

“Well, d’ye see,” burst forth Carson, breaking the silence which sooner or later falls upon the party who dare make of Muscat a promenade. “Well, d’ye see, this Muscat, as I take it, is about as lively as the bottom of a Portland quarry !”

The daring promenaders looked askance at the chain of barren rocks which frowned at them on every side, and apparently “took it” likewise, for they answered never a word.

Determined to make the most of their outing, the ladies stopped awhile to watch a dismal ox, guided by a dismal man, descend a

steep incline, drawing a pig-skin of water out of an adjacent hole to the tune of the ungreased roller over which the draw-rope ran. Three date palms, an almond, and an acacia tree stood in forlornness there; the latter with the surrounding scenery reminding one irresistibly of Nourmahal's song:

Our rocks are rough, but smiling there,
Th' acacia waves her yellow hair.

Except that this particular acacia was apparently bald and joyless. Surrounded by plots of long, coarse grass, it had beckoned them to the spot even before the cart-wheel music creaked upon their ears.

It was "the Wells," or rather, it was one of them. The other two with their accompanying vegetation were out of sight, almost out of hearing. To have had the three Wells close together, with the combined luxury of nine date palms, three almond, and three acacia trees, would have been too much. Poetry on "balmy Muscat" or "spicy Oman" must have been the certain result. Hence possibly their

separation ; the Muscattee not hankering after local poesy.

Leaving the oasis to the fresh water, they climbed the hill-pass leading to Al Mattrah, and sat them down to rest near the tower at its summit, to the delight of the three Arab watchmen—I should say, the Guard.

“ How I would like to have that woman’s nose-ring,” sighed Edith, as an enormous Seedie woman (Swahilli, native of Zanzibar), with a fine turquoise, set in rough silver, marched through the gate on her way to Mattrah, carrying her shoes in her hand, and driving a donkey before her.

“ Nothing simpler ! ” said Norris. And the faithful Blunt—of opinion that everyone could or should understand English—hurried after the stalwart lady and addressed her with : “ I say, how much for the nose-band, old girl ? ”

The old girl stopped, and grinned good-humouredly all over her particularly Seedie face. The coxswain—burliest and best-natured of men ; a man for whom even the honest and

appropriate name of John seemed to his messmates scarcely familiar enough, and whom they, the favoured ones, therefore delighted to distinguish as "Curly"—"Old Curly"—surveyed her contemptuously; then dug his finger into her ribs, presumably to see if she was real, and finally handed her over to the interpreter. "You talk to her, Aboul," said he, "the poor thing don't seem to understand decent lingo."

Under Aboul Mirza's skilful management, the buxom Beebie soon parted with her turquoise, and, well satisfied with her bargain, grinned a "Yambo" and rolled down the hill after her animal.

After this, the "Guard" seemed anxious to dispose of each or any of their accoutrements for the bright rupee.

"Now, that little girl ought to have a nice face," said Carson, pointing to an Arab woman, who toiled laboriously up the pass after her husband. "If not, it's an injustice to her figure."

"She certainly has a nice figure," said

Mrs. Elton, watching the small, slightly made woman with a critical eye, whilst the husband passed on down the hill.

“And I insist upon being shown her face,” added Edith.

The Commander looked at Aboul Mirza inquiringly, and just then the small blue-veiled and cloaked figure glided by.

“Hist! I see 'bout it!” whispered Aboul, moving quickly after her.

“I'm sure she will not let you gentlemen look,” said Mrs. Elton.

“Won't she?” gently murmured Carson. “The almighty rupee would bring stranger things than that to light.”

The woman now turned quickly towards the receding figure of her husband, then stepped noiselessly behind the tower.

“Come along; all right,” said Aboul, in low tones. “She only want the backsheesh.”

“Well, tell her to off mask, and I'll give her a rupee,” said the Commander.

“She say, rather have rupee first,” returned Aboul. And Norris produced the coin.

“Now then,” cried Edith eagerly.

“Now then,” exclaimed Mrs. Elton.

The thick blue veil of the Arab woman was removed, a pair of bloodshot eyes were raised in prayer to the white man, a pair of thin, dried lips muttered hoarsely, “Sahib ! Sahib !” and in two minutes there was nothing of the white man left amongst those hills save the echo of his mighty laugh.

The ancient dame smiled for the first time for many a long year as she replaced her veil ; and, for nearly a week, Edith carefully eschewed woman’s fatal curiosity.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. ELTON's boudoir !

Not one of the tiny sanctums made up of curtains and knick-knacks, into which rough man scarcely dares venture ; but a large square room made up principally of mats and punkahs ; a matted floor, mat-covered lounges ; a room in which man may wear his great heavy boots, raise his great rough voice, laugh his great rough laugh without a fear of desecration ; a room lightly built upon the flat house-top, and carefully opened to the four winds of heaven ; open also at certain hours to the rude denizens of earth.

The clock strikes ! Rude man may enter.

Upon the centre lounge Edith lies asleep ; the breeze from the punkah stirs her dark

hair, and plays amongst the light folds of her dress. Her face, half lost in the soft cushions, shows part of a small mouth around which even in sleep the dimples play, always acting their part in a happy expression which needs but the bright glance of the dark blue eye to be almost perfect.

Close to Edith lies Mrs. Elton, thinking and watching. So she has watched and thought all through the long hours since tiffin.

The days have been cooler of late, for a hot dry wind at Muscat does the work of a shower of rain on a sultry day in England ; but not for a moment has Mrs. Elton closed her eyes in sleep. Still, she lies thinking ; and of what ?

The boudoir is taken ; we are reckless now. We invest and surprise the lady's innermost chamber ; nothing less will satisfy us. The thoughts so taken by surprise are not pleasant ones, and do not belie the quick restless movement, the frowning face of the speaker ; now, for the hundredth time, they review the

past, and daringly arrange the future. They form themselves into a language which may never escape their chamber, but which swells and agitates it almost to bursting. We, within the chamber, hear its words.

“Fool that I am!” they flow fiercely. “Stupid fool then! timorous fool now! I might have forced him to marry me then, for he was repentant; and I, well, I pretended to be. Repentant, indeed! Not I. I gloried in what he was pleased to call our folly; for I meant it to end in matrimony. Why else did I tempt him? Poor Norris! Poor Jack! And then, with the game in my own hands, possible loss of reputation, as if I hadn’t thought of that! Innocency wrecked! as if I could not always remember how to act that, and fifty other heart-rending appeals. I must needs turn proud, forsooth, when he talked of reparation, and scorn his pitying offer of marriage! Ah, if I could but have foreseen that he would take me at my word, and forget me for that child, Edith.

“How could I imagine that he would

grow tired? I was prettier as a woman of twenty-six than I had been as a child of sixteen, and then a man had lost happiness and hope, for love of me. Lost all but the remembrance of his love, as I know now, and much good that will do him!" She laughed bitterly, and her thoughts reverted to Norris once more. "Well, he did forget. And I, the proud fool, married George. Was I likely to stop quietly in England, when marriage with my poor dear old husband would bring me out here—to Jack? And now, I wish Jack was not so certain to notice if I have taken a 'peg' too many; now, the old idiot actually has her out here!"

"If Daymon, with his obtrusive old play-fellowship, were not playing into my hands, I should kill him. If George were not alive, he, my darling Jack, would marry me now! I am sure of it. He knows how I loved him once; he cannot doubt that I love him still; are we not 'Jack' and 'Julia' to one another in spite of his never referring to the bygone days? He respects

the marriage tie too much for that! Perhaps now, he respects—I must try not to laugh—he respects me!

“The marriage tie? said I. Its noose is around my neck alone, and each word he speaks draws it tighter and tighter until it throttles me. My pride tied it; why should not love—he called it folly—loosen it?

“If Daymon were not innocently playing into my hands, again I say it, I should kill her. I swear it. I like to feel it.

“If George were not alive, Jack would marry me. Why should he live in my road? Why should I not——?” But now the language of thought loses itself in confusion, and we fly its chamber ere it again takes meaning. Another recess, another heart, lies before us. Its doors wide open; fearing no surprise, always prepared for rightful search. Within are treasured up feelings so pure, chords so tender, that purity and tenderness alone should dare to stir them; then, have we the right to search? Into that chamber’s secrets, even a mother’s love has never

penetrated. They lie but half understood in their own pure home. Then, again, have we the right to search ?

Love, in its own good time, will awaken the tender chords, and we will listen to its tale as the lips give it birth ; but at the threshold of that recess we pause and turn back.

Mrs. Elton's boudoir ! Mrs. Elton still watching. Edith asleep.

The scene is the same, but the actresses have exchanged parts. It is Edith who moves restlessly upon her couch ; Mrs. Elton who lies still, and, to judge from her expression, happy. Happy, if such a word may describe such a condition.

A sharp frightened cry ! and Edith sits upright, and looks nervously around her ; whilst Mrs. Elton—all the happiness dying out of her face—starts to her feet fearfully—guiltily. Then Edith tries to laugh, but the merry tone is wanting, and a glance at Mrs. Elton's face prevents a second attempt and failure.

“Oh! Julia, I beg your pardon; I really could not help it,” she cried. “I so seldom dream; and it took me ‘flat aback,’ as Ernie says.” A little short laugh was all that would come yet; and Edith still looked furtively around, away from Mrs. Elton, as though there should be someone else in the room besides themselves.

“A dream only! You frightened me, child,” and Mrs. Elton moved to the glass and stood looking into it thoughtfully.

“Tell me your dream,” she said, turning quickly on Edith.

“Do you believe in them?” asked Edith, the uneasy look not yet passed away.

“Don’t be a fool. Of course I can believe in them if I want to. But all I want now is to pass the time until the men come back from Bushire. Besides, Captain Norris says that, according to the Prophet, dreams are a forty-sixth part of the prophetic capacity.”

Edith slowly joined her aunt. “You are not particularly pleased, Julia,” said she. “And I really could not give a description of my

dream if I tried. It was only a jumble after all. Everyone against poor me, and, yes, I think it was, Uncle George. Then, just as Captain Norris and Ernie were beginning to do something dreadful, you appeared with Aboul Mirza, of all people in the world, as our guardian angel, and carried us off to Plympton in triumph. Yet even now I can't quite remember what made me scream and so wake up."

"Master Ernie's infidelity perhaps, or my guardianship!" said Mrs. Elton, laughing loudly. "So they were going to do something dreadful to you, were they? Slow poisoning, eh? And Aboul Mirza and I saved you? Ah! I shall try and get another hour's sleep before dinner! You can leave the door open, please; your dream is not enlivening, my dear." And Mrs. Elton lay down again to think yet more deeply than before; whilst Edith walked out on the open roof and stood in the shadow of the wall, looking down upon the network of narrow, dirty streets.

The high walls of Jellàlli and Mirani, on opposite sides of the Residency, rise high above her, both built in the lofty style of the old Portuguese conquerors, both still showing on their crumbling walls marks of the conflict once waged between them, when the present Sultan and a rival Sheikh had spent a day or two bombarding one another across the city, to the amusement of the Political Agent at that stirring time, who thought it unnecessary to stop the fun until a shot fell sufficiently short of the fort to be beyond a joke at the Residency. Then, all the moral influence of Great Britain had been brought into action, and the rival Sheikhs had quietly sat down to rice and ghee in their own fastnesses. Eventually the present Sultan was starved out of his fort, Jellàlli, and fled to Mattrah, whence he was taken to Bombay. After a year or two in seclusion he made another attempt on Muscat, was taken prisoner and "walled up," or put in a matbak in the house of his rival, being

rescued by his old friend the Political Agent just as starvation and limited supplies of oxygen were on the point of finishing him.

Such is his history, or something like it ; but what happened to him after his release from the walling up, and how he became Sultan, are matters of no moment ; enough has been said to show that the Arab will put up with inconveniences to be considered a king in his own country.

Upon the rippling surface of the cove, the man-of-war, and a few bungalows waiting for dates, lie motionless ; nothing stirs except a frightened fish rising with a splash from the depths beneath, a solitary canoe skimming above. In the latter—a broken paddle for a mast, a dilapidated calico awning for a sail—a wily Arab travels at his own leisure and the zephyr's caprice towards Sudab. A plank, pushed out over the weather side, on which he can crawl out or in according as the breeze freshens or dies, and so frustrate a disposition on the part of the boat

to turn turtle, shows that the uneducated Ichthyophagi are quite conversant with the principle of a lever of the first kind.

Caring for nothing, why should he ? save the strength of his tottering mast—thinking of nothing, why should he ? save the direction of the capricious zephyr—the Arab disappears through the Gap, and again the fish in the cove have it all their own way.

This seems only right and proper, so we will return to the Residency.

Mrs. Elton remained lying down in her boudoir, and Edith stood alone upon the house-top until the sun set behind the old West Castle at Makalla, and it was time for both ladies to struggle through that awful trial to the sex—a formal dinner with never a male companion.

Mrs. Elton was silent—so was Edith. Apparently Mrs. Elton was sulky—so apparently was Edith. Ladies are so sometimes, and by reason of no greater affliction than the absence of men.

Eight—nine o'clock passed sulkily by.

“I wish to goodness they would come back,” said Mrs. Elton for the twentieth time that evening. “They should be here by now if they really left Boshire at sunset. I hope nothing has gone wrong, Edith. Fancy if dear Jack—I mean——”

But Mrs. Elton stopped, seemingly confused at Edith’s wondering look.

Seemingly confused, because she had said “dear Jack” of cunning aforethought.

Edith certainly did wonder much, but evidently could think of nothing appropriate to say; so Mrs. Elton, bent on carrying out her cunning programme, gave a little scornful laugh and said pityingly: “Poor dear child! I am so sorry! I quite forgot your innocent presence. What a shocking opinion you will have of poor Jack and I, henceforth and for ever!” And the laugh rang out scornfully again, though Mrs. Elton’s eyes anxiously watched the effect of Mrs. Elton’s words.

Edith did not speak for a few minutes. Then her voice was very low, and the words came slowly and painfully.

“ So you and Jack—Captain Norris—love one another ! ”

Mrs. Elton almost blushed ; perhaps her colour really did deepen, but it was after dinner, and an extra flush would be inappreciable. It was putting the position so outrageously plain—to a married woman, too !

“ The little chit is scarcely so innocent as I thought,” she decided, as she nodded flipantly at her niece.

But just then Edith was thinking little enough of matrimonial wiles and deceptions. In fancy she was far away, listening to words which reached her from a certain little room at home. “ Through her alone I know what love means,” and she sighed, and murmured in tones, which Mrs. Elton easily caught: “ It was her he meant, then ; and he loves her still.”

Mrs. Elton’s blush, giving her the benefit of the doubt, and supposing it to have come, had quickly died away, and she smiled exultingly as she heard Edith’s words. Little mysterious suggestions were so easy to make, and Edith was so simple.

“Miss Innocence won’t think much of her chance with Jack now,” thought she, “and will probably go in for Ernie Daymon, out of sheer disgust at the other one’s wickedness.”

She little knew that Daymon’s heart was in London, and that Edith was aware of the fact, or, more correctly, the phenomenon.

“You see, my dear,” she resumed, in airy tones, carefully driving nails into poor Edith’s coffin, “dear old Jack and I have always been spooney.” And a little frothy laugh bubbled up the matronly throat.

“Then why were you not married?” Having put which somewhat natural question, Edith looked greatly ashamed of herself for having said so much, and relapsed into silence and sadness.

“Money, my dear, and possibly—he! he! —a hankering after forbidden fruit.”

Mrs. Elton was evidently growing frisky, and, to Edith, unintelligible.

“But as I was saying, dear,” she resumed, “such wickedness is very shocking; and

really, if Jack was not so dreadfully fond of me——”

“Yes; I suppose he is wicked. I had not thought of that,” interrupted Edith’s low voice; so low and sad that Mrs. Elton saw that no more nails were needed.

Another hour passed slowly by, and then was heard a sound as of incoming and jovial white men.

For the last three days, several of the *Dainty’s* officers, the Political Agent, and the Residency Doctor had been away, travelling, on camels, horses, and donkeys, to Boshire, a small village about fifteen miles off, where were hot springs, and a tree or two over and above the date palms, and which was consequently a sanitarium for the Muscattees.

The returning travellers soon arrived upon the roof; Mr. Elton and the Commander appearing first up the ladder.

“Back again, dear,” said the Political Agent cheerily. “You really ought not to have waited up for us,” he added, looking

tenderly at his delicate wife, who was certainly flushed and feverish.

"If you will allow me," said she, calmly ignoring the angle of inclination of his face, "shaking hands with Captain Norris will scarcely increase my sufferings."

"Ah, no," he murmured, subsiding into a chair.

"How have you enjoyed your trip, Captain Norris?" continued she. "Ah, Mr. Daymon, you have been anxiously expected, I can tell you."

The latter remark was in a gentle aside to the First Lieutenant, just loud enough to benefit the Commander, who turned away directly he heard it, whilst Daymon himself smiled politely, but looked a little puzzled.

"Gad!" thought he, "she can scarcely imagine that Edith was anxious about me; no, that can't be it. It must be one of her incomprehensible 'evening' jokes."

The weary ones were soon hard at work upon that most glorious meal—supper.

Carson, in stolid silence, even from bad words, was doing extremely well. Mrs. Elton managed to eat a little, "just to be pleasant," and to drink a good deal, presumably to be pleasanter. The others followed, more or less, the example set by Carson. Blunt had retired to the cook-house, to be taken care of by its Portuguese, or, to be correct, Goalese president; and Aboul Mirza and his boy Jaafar both squatted on their heels in one corner of the roof, and, digging their fingers into the dish before them, were taking care of themselves at the expense of a pillau of fowl. Altogether, the meal progressed favourably, however much the digestive organs may have "silently thought of the morrow."

Fingers, it must be admitted, are handier than forks; and Aboul Mirza had finished his pillau and washed his hands long before the others had laid aside the labouring silver.

He then drew near the table, and was promptly offered a glass of wine by Mrs. Elton.

"The righteous shall be given to drink of pure wine sealed; the seal thereof shall be

musk," quoted he, with a knowing grin, as he drank the liquor.*

If a Mahomedan is unable to find plausible excuses in the Koran itself, for anything or everything, he has only to search in the "Tradition" to get suited.

Dogherty looked in disgust at the man who would break through one of the strictest rules of his religion, and quote from "The Book" to excuse it. The others, having observed the same thing happen before, laughed. They laughed louder as a couple of lizards, at that moment peering cautiously over the wall, were received by Aboul with an unmistakable curse, and a vicious smash of the empty glass.

"What the deuce are you about, sir?" asked the Commander, directly he found words to speak.

Aboul looked at the fragments of glass, and muttered something about "Ayesha," and "that lizard give poison to snake;" but he was evidently ashamed at having so forgotten

* Aboul Mirza's quotations are given correctly, not as he spoke them, in broken English.

English manners, and Edith, in the kindness of her heart, interceded. Norris needed no other inducement to forgive anybody, and the Interpreter hastened, in his quiet, excited way, to excuse himself.

“That beast, what you call ‘lizard.’ All good Mahomedans kill that lizard, because he give poison to snake.”

“Extraordinary! And what better reason could you have?” inquired Dogherty.

To which Mrs. Elton, with a languid smile, added: “What, indeed?”

“If you believe it!” murmured a voice, understood by all to proceed from Carson. Not that the words were actually spoken, but the growl which came from his direction was not difficult of interpretation.

Dogherty turned fiercely on the “sceptic and scoffer;” but on observing that he had fallen peacefully asleep, turned his attention once more to Aboul Mirza, who, fairly started, and with a good stimulant to talk on, was more than usually communicative.

“Shia man—‘Shia’ means ‘dam black-

guard'; but we really good men. Shia man have still better reason for killing that lizard," said he. "One day when Ali, the Khalif, nephew of Mahomet, and marry his daughter Fatimah. One day when he walk in bazaar, he see one little boy—three, suppose four months old—lie in the road. Then he cry, and take him home to his wife Fatimah, and she cry; and she feed him with plenty milk and dates, and that bread—you call 'slap jack.' And he grow up big man—big, all same Carson sahib." Here the Interpreter glanced towards Carson, who was still fast asleep, and murmured cunningly: "Poor Carson sahib! I think he been too much in the sun to-day. The sun make me feel like that some days."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mrs. Elton loudly. "You wicked man! you'll feel like it now, after another glass of sherry." And she filled him a bumper, whilst Mr. Elton feebly inquired if she hadn't most wonderful spirits, and if it wasn't "extraordinary in her delicate state of health?" The man looked not

more than half amused ; the other lady—disgusted.

“I tell you more,” continued the Interpreter, smacking his lips. “When that little boy grow into big man—perhaps ninety years old—he meet Ayesha—you know Ayesha? that woman, Mahomet’s favourite wife. And he ask Ayesha: ‘I say, come along; you marry me.’ But she say: ‘How’s that, I marry you? I number one woman; I Prophet’s wife.’ Then he say: ‘Never mind, come along. If not, I kill you.’ Then she say: ‘S’pose you kill Ali, then you can marry me.’ Because that woman she hate the Khalif Ali. So she give him number one sword with plenty verse of Koran on it, and when the Vicar of God—that’s what we call Ali—pray, he go into mosque and kill Ali. And when he come out with Ali’s all bloody head, that woman Ayesha look from she’s housetop near and laugh—laugh so much that she fall down ; and same time as she touch the ground God turn her into all same lizard. So,” concluded the Interpreter gravely, “that

man he never marry Ayesha, and all good followers of Ali kill the lizard."

"Curious, most curious!" remarked Dogherty, directing at Carson a sniff of scorn, which said, as plainly as sniff could, that he would have made the same remark even though that miserable smoker had not been so evidently oblivious to all around.

Then he wondered if he could remember the story for his journal; but it was noticeable that otherwise he passed by this second reason for killing lizards in silence.

"I, for one, think that poor Ayesha was very hardly treated," said Mrs. Elton, with a meaning look at Norris, which was quite thrown away.

"Ugh!" snorted the Political Agent, rather defiantly for him. "Why, my dear, she apparently went in for murder, and—a—that."

"I don't remember saying that she didn't," retorted his wife.

"Ah!" murmured the Political Agent; whilst Aboul looked up fiercely for a second,

and muttered a few sentences in Persian, which would have distinctly implied to a man learned in the *zabon*, that “by the grave of Houssein the martyr, Mrs. Elton was a white daughter of an unbelieving descendant of Ayesha the vile.”

“Have you inquired what those heaps of stones, which we passed beyond Mattrah, mean?” queried Dogherty, bringing up the subsiding Political Agent with a start.

No; that hard-worked official had not inquired. Thought it unlikely that he ever should inquire. In point of fact—and here he settled himself comfortably again—did not particularly care if he never knew.

After this lamentable display of ignorance and supineness by a man who, of all others, should have been an authority, Dogherty turned appealingly to Aboul Mirza, and not in vain.

“I know, Hakim sahib,” said he. “I tell you. Plenty years ago—perhaps one hundred or thousand years ago—when old man he grow old, and knees grow weak, no good, his

friends come and bring bread and little water, and take that old man out, and set him down by the road with the grub. Sometimes, when his friends—his son, his daughter—have plenty money, they give him dates, and rice, and milk, too. But most times they only give bread and little water. After some more days—s'pose two, s'pose three—old man he die, all same dog. Then, all the Arab man who go by throw stones; keep on throw stones until he covered up, and make mound. Wallah!"

Aboul looked well pleased with himself and his story; but his hearers made no remark. Perhaps the idea of the poor old Arab being carried by his nearest and dearest without the city, and then left by the wayside to die "all same dog," did not present a happy picture to them.

The Interpreter thought this a favourable opportunity to see how his helping himself to another glass of sherry would be taken. The trial proved eminently successful. He took it in a tumbler, and with renewed eager-

ness commenced to enlarge upon Mahomet's night journey to Heaven, *via* Jerusalem, on the beast "Borak;" on which occasion that "last and greatest of the prophets"—he said he was, and his followers say he ought to know—met Adam, whom he discovered to be a man of "very dark brick-dust complexion, for he was made out of reddish earth, whence his name Adam;" and Moussa (Moses), who is "a man of tall stature, and the colour of wheat, and of middling body;" and Issa (Jesus), who is "a middle-sized man, with a red-and-white complexion, and hair not curly, but flowing loosely."

With so many accurately described characters, the Interpreter's story could not have failed to be interesting; but he had barely mounted Mahomet on his beast "Borak," which is something between a mule and an ass, and started him heavenward, when Carson awoke.

That officer's eyes were heavy, but speedily became fixed with an intense curiosity, as they took in the situation, and turned inquiringly towards Dogherty.

Then Carson spoke.

“I say, Hakim,” said he—Aboul Mirza beating a hasty retreat—“you might have sketched Blunt astride that beast of his to-day for a correct picture of the Prophet on his ‘night journey,’ instead of trying to persuade those ugly-headed ophthalmic beggars at Bushire to sit, and getting called ‘Shaithân’ and ‘Eblis’ for putting one of their fly-bitten youngsters on paper.”

“The Doctor would have had to sketch Blunt’s head from memory,” laughed the Commander. ‘I looked round for him twice, and each time his ‘Borak’ had ‘given way for’ard’—as he explained afterwards—‘and both his head and shoulders were lost to sight in the soft mud.’”

“The ‘borak,’ as the Captain says he was, though, beggin’ your pardon, sir, and my lady, I ain’t heard of the breed before, weren’t hardly up to my weight, which is nigh ‘pon fourteen stone,” respectfully interposed Blunt from behind the Commander’s chair; “not but what he might have held up if I could ‘a’

kept farther back 'pon the stern of 'im. I've rode most everything ; but, whether 'tis my fourteen stone or the animal's weak 'ead gear, I most always comes over the bows of a—a—”

“ ‘Borak.’ Well, dash it ! ‘borak,’ ” murmured Carson.

“ Well, sir ; I knows nothin’ about them. They might be mules, or they might be asses, or they might be vicey versey ; but I expect they ain’t so unlike the old familiar donk, neither.” And the coxswain grinned. “ But beggin’ pardon, sir, and my lady, and no offence to either sex, I often think——” Here Blunt paused for breath, and the Commander looked up quickly. He knew his man ; they had been over half the world together ; and he was merely wondering just then where Blunt could have got “it” in sufficient quantity and strength. “ It,” meaning liquor. For without liquor—considerable quantities of powerful liquor—Blunt seldom took breath through too much talking. “ I often think,” resumed that privileged person, with awful

distinctness of utterance, and a stony, fixed look at the Commander, which said plainly : “I know what I’ve ‘ad, and that it isn’t more than’s good for me”—“I often think that because a sailor-man ain’t all a-taut-oh ‘pon a jackass, shore-going folks—no offence Mr. Elton, sir—rather malingers them like. But I make bold so ask,” and here the coxswain’s glance at his Commander assumed a glazed steadiness, which even a totally unexpected lurch to port was powerless to turn aside—“I make bold to ask, what they could do without us ? Why, take a ordinary case. Tram-car off the rails ! Does the man who runs the machine hollar out to the leather-neck’d sojer a sittin’ outside, keepin’ a ‘light touch on ‘is right-and man,’ and waitin’ to ‘step off together’ directly the band strikes up. Or to the clerk”—anyone who was neither soldier nor sailor was clerk according to Blunt—“a starin’ around quite the ‘elpless gentleman ? No, no ; not he ! It ain’t ‘poor ‘armless tar !’ then. It’s ‘Lend us a ‘and, Jack, my lad !’ And Jack’s down from aloft

in a brace of shakes, and does it ; does it, I say—no offence, Mr. Elton, sir, and Miss Edith—like a seaman.”

An almost imperceptible lurch preceded the “seaman,” and, with a triumphant hiccup, Blunt became silent.

“Blunt !”

“Sir.”

“Get the boat in.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

The steady stare relaxed, the eyes blinked deferentially, and, with an upward hitch of the right arm, Blunt, head erect, and not a step but would have “trod a plank,” respectfully, stiffly withdrew.

Arrived at the doorway, near which stood the table with tray and glasses, he glanced furtively over his shoulder, and paused for a moment on discovering himself out of sight of the Commander. Then he filled himself a bumper, held it to his lips just long enough to take a correct bearing of the top of the ladder down which he had to climb, tossed off the liquor, and marched on his course bravely.

"You won't be very hard on him, will you, Captain Norris?" prayed Edith. "I'm positive he had only a little drop."

"May I ask how he got that little drop?" said the Commander smiling. "Upon my word I'm curious to know, and you seem to be the only one in the secret."

"Now, now; that won't do," laughed Edith. "You must promise me to let him off. Remember the poor fellow's pluck, and how he even lost his fingers to save Ernie. But forgive me, Captain Norris," she broke off earnestly, "I am so stupid; and of course you remember I did not mean to pain you."

"Yes, I remember," said Norris slowly. "I am not likely to forget. But you must have a pretty opinion of me, Edith," he continued, trying to speak banteringly, though but half succeeding. "Twice this evening you have prayed me not to be 'very hard.' Am I so terrible a character?"

Edith looked up eagerly; and surely the love-light—which shines in eyes like Edith's for one alone—must have shone then for a

moment. But Mrs. Elton's loud laugh jarred upon her, bringing to mind the tale of wickedness—her own wickedness principally, thought Edith—of that afternoon ; and the love-light, if it ever shone, died, ere Norris caught a ray ; leaving only a half-angry, half-sorrowful glance for him to helplessly wonder at.

“ She seems to fear me now ! ” he thought bitterly, as some minutes later the officers pulled off to the *Dainty*. “ It was hard enough, God knows, to witness her love for Daymon ! But now !—to be feared ! Well, I must beat it down. I will beat it down,” he muttered, almost fiercely. And alongside him, dozing and swaying to and fro with the boat's gentle motion, sat Daymon, dreaming again of the parting kiss, which had been given him a long year ago, and was to last him through two more—longer and drearier.

Slowly they climbed the ship's side, and in stolid silence.

Blunt saw his boat moored at the boom for the night.

Half-an-hour later the quartermaster of the watch—had he not been wrapt in thought behind the midship gun—might have observed a ponderous, thick-soled foot, slowly leave the last step of the ladder reaching down from the fore rigging, and grope cautiously for sure holding ground upon the seemingly mountainous deck. The object of that first uncertain groper achieved, a second carefully descended and took up a hazardous, indeed impossible, position at right angles, a voice murmuring the while, in tones joyfully triumphant: “Drunk, am I? That’s as may be, or otherwise. But I’m d—d if I’m incapable.” Here the uncertain feet boldly asserted themselves, demonstrating once for all, with great clearness, the impossibility of their position, and after a short pause, the voice—in tones of less joy certainly, but with a world of subdued triumph—murmured, from a good central position in a coil of rope: “Only

a 'armless tar ! But not incapable, for he's been over the fore topmast head ; and not drunk, for here he is turned into his own 'ammick ; and here's the man as'll swear to it. An' that's me—John Blunt."

CHAPTER IV.

DREAMILY and almost uneventfully time glided on in the Arab city and cove. Each day brought its monotonous routine; each night brought to many in the *Dainty* their sole pleasure, the thought that “paying off” was twenty-four hours nearer.

But the dull apathy of the many, however it might point a moral, would scarcely adorn a tale; the story of how fools kill time would be but poor reading; we must follow the few who lived and tried to enjoy.

Upon this evening all the Europeans, save one, are thrilled with a great excitement. The fish fin their way around the ship in countless detached squadrons; they lie in shoals nestled

against the ship's side, unwatched, uncared for. The music of "the Wells" charms not the cultivated European ear; the blind lion at the Sultan's palace gates waits in vain to sniff—with cultivated snort—the scent of the passing white man.

No Christian smell will whet the royal favourite's appetite to-night. Each unbeliever thrills with a common excitement—the prospect of change! And the *Dainty* is preparing for sea.

The Residency boat, piled high with luggage—for, even up the Gulf, the lady's indispensable trunk retains its stately dimensions—comes alongside the port gangway; at the same time Captain Norris' galley, with the Political Agent, Mrs. Elton, and Edith, all smiles and eagerness, reaches the opposite side. The Commander has given up his cabin to the ladies, and thither they repair to enjoy the unwonted luxury of unpacking.

Over the poop rails leans the one European whose feelings remain unthrilled amidst the general hurry of departure; the one English-

man in Muscat who feels no excitement, and has no intention of departing.

But the eagerness of all around has its effect even upon him ; and Doctor Brown, the Residency Surgeon, as he leans on the rails with Daymon at his side, speaks for once of himself. Seldom before has he spoken of his home—never of himself ; and Daymon listens with interest to the man who, twelve years before, had arrived at the Muscat Residency, and who—with the exception of a few weeks' leave some years ago—has remained there ever since.

A dozen Political Agents have come and gone, each in turn having been his one white friend. Sultans have been enthroned, their rivals poisoned, their unfaithful wives drowned, their old wives otherwise disposed of ; but, without a wish for change, the Residency Surgeon still lives upon his roof amidst the ever crumbling walls of the Arab city.

“ Well, that's strange ! ” he was saying slowly. Time was when words came quickly enough to his lips ; but that was twelve years

ago. “Why! I once lodged at old Mother Flynn’s in Lincoln’s Inn Fields myself. I was a student at King’s College then. Your brother is walking the hospital now, I suppose?”

Daymon nodded. “Yes; going through his last year there. I spent a couple of days at Mrs. Flynn’s with him, whilst he was doing his two months’ compulsory residence near the hospital.”

The Doctor smiled grimly. Time was when his smiles were jovial; but that, too, was twelve years ago. “Ah! poor old Mother Flynn!” said he. “How she used to growl when the porter of King’s rang her up at about 2 a.m., to say that Polly Jenkins, or Jones, was took ill before her time, and that it was her ‘young gentleman’s turn for the case.’ I used to growl too, as long as I was her ‘young gentleman,’ and had to attend the suffering Polly. I believe I was the first to suggest to the poor old soul that she could have a bell fixed close to the young gentleman’s bed in the little back room;—you know it?”

Daymon laughed. "Yes, I know the bed, and the washing-stand. There was not much else to know, if I remember right."

"Perfectly correct," rejoined Brown, gravely. "There was *not* much else. Indeed, I can recall nothing, bar the picture of the 'man and dog fight,' which hung over against the door leading from the sitting-room. Well, I persuaded her to have the student's bell fixed close to the bed, and I believe that, by so doing, I added ten years to her life; at any rate, a good many hours to her sleep."

"It's still there!" cried Daymon. "The porter rang my young brother up several times whilst I was with him, especially on Saturday nights. Gin was more plentiful, and the dens we visited were most objectionable then. A medical student's life is not all luncheons at the Holborn, and dinners at the 'Horseshoe Tavern,' eh, Doctor?"

Daymon strolled away, on duty bent; and the Residency Surgeon's thoughts wandered back to the pleasanter scenes of his student life,

to a time when “Holborn” and “Horseshoe” taverns had no charms for him—when he resolutely turned his back upon Cremorne and Rosherville, and spent his few spare coins in ‘bus fares between High Holborn and Notting Hill ; and was more than content to drink his cup of weak tea—romancing, in whispers, of future champagne—with the saucy, light-haired girl who sat by his side, and had laughingly promised to be his wife whenever he should have made sufficient money to deserve her. Little cared he then for the elderly widow who smiled sourly at the foundation of his romantic castles. She had married for love, she said : “And look what it has brought me to.” Again, in fancy, he could hear the disappointed old lady’s voice requesting him to, yet once more, observe what love had done for her ; could hear the sour cackle which followed her request. But no ; it was only Mrs. Elton’s loud laugh ringing through the captain’s cabin, and rousing him with a start from his reverie.

“I suppose you won’t change your mind

and come over to that cheerful spot, Jask, with us?" said Daymon, who, First Lieutenant-like, had been troubling himself about the many things needful in a ship-of-war preparing for sea, and whose last job had been seeing Jassim, the contractor, and his "live stock," safely stowed on board. "Better come, old fellow," he continued cheerily. "By Jove, I'll make the ladies ask you!"

"Leave me alone," said the Doctor, gruffly. "I mean never mind me, Daymon. I beg your pardon," he added quickly; "but the ladies don't want me; and I—well, a man who settles down for life at Muscat gets used to a single-cup tea-fight, and is not to be tempted by a lady—of all people in the world—to Jask."

Brown spoke half banteringly, and Daymon laughed too, as more sounds of Mrs. Elton's revelry reached them from the captain's cabin.

"Won't that tempt you?" said he. "Mrs. Elton is making the corks fly already. How glad Elton must be that he's neither Spaniard

nor Chilian ! Fancy, having to keep the sisters-in-law, if there were any ; to marry a whole family like that ! ”

The Doctor’s laugh ceased, and he turned abruptly on Daymon. “ You are not engaged, are you ? ” said he.

Then, before Daymon had time to say a word in his defence, he continued rapidly : “ Of course you are not. Who’d be mad enough to get engaged, and then come out here ? ”

Daymon, by no means prepared to plead insanity, looked up in surprise at the usually quiet Doctor, who seemed for this once to have thrown reserve aside, and to be eager to give his feelings free vent.

Yet even now the caution of years was not forgotten, and he sought to excuse to himself his discarded reticence.

“ Naval Officers visit many places, see many acts, and hear many tales of folly.” This was his excuse for speaking, and then he went on rapidly : “ Listen to mine ; the story of a man who at three-and-twenty imagined that he had found his fate. So, in

truth, he had, but not quite in the way he fancied. You naval men don't care to hear of other fellows' love affairs—got too many of your own, so we'll drop the preliminaries. At four-and-twenty our friend left England, an engaged man, a Doctor in the Indian Civil—a happy, hard-working fellow, who hoped to save money, and in the course of a few months finish writing a book which was to turn him into a man of decent means and a Benedict. She was sixteen then," the Doctor sighed, and glanced involuntarily towards the captain's cabin, "and remained at home, happy possibly in her love for him. Six months passed. The book progressed favourably; and the mail which should have brought her letter brought one from her widowed mother instead. There were the usual enclosures—the blotted lines of regret from her, the presents returned by the widowed mother. What matter what the last were—a successfully extracted bone, a photo of our hero in the dissecting room. What matters it? Medical students will give such things.

“ Six more months passed. The Doctor was still at Muscat ; the book at a standstill.

“ Another six, and the Doctor started off for England on three months' leave. What he expected to discover God alone knew. What he really did discover was arrived at in less than a week. The widowed mother had it all her own way ; the daughter was persuaded that she could 'do better,' and at the end of the second week he was on his road back to Muscat. The book was laid aside.”

The Doctor whistled softly as he leant still farther over the rails.

He had no idea of tune.

“ Hard luck, old fellow ! ” said Daymon, and then the whistle ceased, and the Doctor drew himself up with the air of a man who would escape the pity which a moment of weakness has provoked.

His story certainly was pitiful. Daymon felt that ; and then he grew triumphant, as all we presumably successful ones do, at the thought of how assured was his own future happiness ; how impossible that aught

could lessen the love which was pledged to him.

Was he hard or selfish ? Neither. There breathed no more tender-hearted a man than Ernest Daymon. He simply loved, believed, and was triumphant.

“Don’t be in a hurry,” said he, as the Doctor moved towards the ladder ; “there are no ladies in Muscat for you to be afraid of keeping waiting.”

“Not now, I thank goodness,” said the Doctor fervently.

“Why, surely you are not going to pretend that you are afraid of Edith, and——”

“No, no. Afraid ! Why should I be afraid of Mrs. Elton ?” interrupted Brown hurriedly.

“Curious beggar !” thought Daymon. “Understands a joke as little as would one of these melancholy devils he lives amongst. Flies off at a tangent the moment the ‘home’ circle is spoken of ; besides, I hadn’t even mentioned Mrs. Elton. Odd beggar !”

The Doctor was still edging away towards

the gangway. Daymon, feeling rather amused, followed him.

The Doctor finding his retreat cut off, stopped. "I suppose," said he, "that you will be made a 'happy man' before long?"

"Not quite yet, I'm afraid," said Daymon, looking a good deal astonished. "But how on earth have you heard?"

"Oh, I know all about it. I can see, though I have lived for twelve years amongst the dust and flies of Muscat."

"Ha! ha! clever man!" laughed Daymon. "I suppose Mrs. Elton has been treating you to her ideas concerning Edith and myself. Why, my dear fellow——"

And in another moment he would have let the real secret of his engagement escape him; but just then the ladies appeared at the cabin door, and with a hasty "Good-bye—special appointment," the Doctor was over the side, "like a rigger," as Edith, who witnessed the evolution observed—and was away in his canoe before Daymon had time to finish his sentence, much less to stop him.

“It’s all very well for a man to keep out of ladies’ society if he wishes to ; and I’m sure we have no desire for his company ; but he need not be rude about it,” grumbled Mrs. Elton when Daymon joined them with a laugh at the Doctor’s sudden exit.

“I don’t think you can call him rude, Julia,” objected Edith.

Mrs. Elton looked nasty.

“I think him most kind and careful,” continued Edith.

“And so he’s paid to be, child,” sneered Mrs. Elton.

Edith was not fond of being called “child ;” but at her age it was a name difficult to complain of, and she had championed Doctor Brown before ; so she merely looked, with great care, far away over Mrs. Elton’s head, and meekly asked Daymon if she might not go on the bridge.

Daymon considered that she might tread undisturbed that vast expanse of safely bounded plankage.

“Without ‘paying my footing?’” laughed

Edith ; " and here come the Commander and Mr. Elton," she added ; " so now, I hope we shall get under way. ' Hurrah for a sailor's life, over the boundless sea ! '

" Bravo, Edith ! All ready for a start, Mrs. Elton ? " asked Norris, briskly.

" Oh, are we really off, Captain Norris ? How delightful ! Do you think it will be at all rough ? "

Norris laughed, and hoped it would not ; then led the way to the bridge.

" You have just missed one of Edith's pretty little romances," continued Mrs. Elton, gushing spitefully. " Doctor Brown, it appears, is a perfect hero ; a victimised lover ; a martyr to misplaced affection. According to her, he should pose as a poorly-pensioned Don Juan, or a too-quickly-forgotten Adonis."

" I know nothing of either Don Juan or Adonis. But I do know that Doctor Brown is an honest, true man," said Edith, colouring a little under the Commander's approving look. " And I believe that some stupid love affair

has made him shun ladies' society, and live in Muscat."

"Right you are, Edith! And I am sure of it," added Daymon.

After which Mrs. Elton's angry "Don't talk nonsense," fell flat.

"It's not nonsense," asserted Edith, very quietly.

Not that such was her usual tone. On the contrary, it was reserved expressly for Mrs. Elton. But against her it was employed with a refined, a truly feminine gusto. Supposing Edith and Mrs. Elton to commence an argument, and allowing them similar temperaments at the moment of starting, it would be found that, as the matron grew nearer and nearer the heat of discussion, the maiden would, in exact proportion, withdraw farther and farther into the cold of carelessness, and that each would arrive at the superlative stages of anger and quietude at about the same time.

"The only nonsense," continued Edith, still very quietly, "would be on his part;

troubling himself about a girl who could never have been worth troubling about."

Little did Edith dream how hard her last quiet words hit her aunt. Still less did she dream how her next would touch poor Norris, as she continued with a laugh. "I suppose that as Ernie would say 'some other fellow has taken the wind out of poor Doctor Brown's sails.' "

The Commander moved away across the bridge, and the others went aft to the chairs on the poop.

"She must have known that I loved her then," thought Norris, "must know that I love her now. And yet she can talk like that! Before Daymon and myself too, of all people! She too is growing a hypocrite, and, God knows, I'd rather have her like Julia than that."

"He is thinking of his love for Julia, and how Uncle George 'took the wind out of his sails,'" thought Edith. "Poor fellow! I quite forgot that. Not that there is any use in my pitying him; and if it is true—what Julia told

me—and I suppose it is, he does not deserve pity ; he ought not to be here another minute, if he loves her still."

And our cross-purposed thinkers were more apart at this moment of his doubt, her disappointment, than when miles had stretched between them, and each had created his or her own misery.

In the meantime Daymon had weighed ; and the sun was already streaking the barren rocks with purple and yellow evening shades, as the little craft turned short round, and steamed out of the cove.

Small-pox, the scourge of the port of Oman's sea and gulf, had broken out more wildly than usual in Muscat. This time the children were the sufferers, and many an Arab mother had moaned and beaten her breast, as she spread the camphor and sweet basil over the body of her last little one ; straightened its swollen limbs, and turned its small disfigured head towards Mecca.

Outside many a hut, the sound of the distressing cough, of the hoarse, scarcely

audible cry, told of the fever raging through at least one small body within ; and often enough the little one—straying in delirium from its mat upon the floor—lay naked in the dust under the shades of the compound's reeds, a pitiable, forbidding object.

What would you ? The mother must buy dates in the market, to live ! The father is a fisherman.

Children suffered this time. At the next visitation the full-grown and able-bodied might be the victims. God knew ! So did Mahomet, some said ! But they—the full-grown ones—neither knew nor cared.

At Mattrah, when the *Dainty's Seedie* boys—specially shipped to work in the sun—huddled with their fat beebies and large families, the disease was rampant—had been for days ; although those 'cute Swahilli boys had taken care not to mention it. Altogether it was well to be off.

No special rows were brewing on the Oman coast. No distinguished Sheikh seemed anxious to—as Aboul Mirza put it—“kick up

a bobbery"; whilst at any time the variola poison might spread to adults—to the Seedie boys, if not to the white men.

So the *Dainty* left; the Political Agent arranged his work, by discovering that it need not be done for an indefinite number of weeks; and the Residency Doctor, feeling happier than he ever had since his present chief arrived, with a wife, remained behind—the one white man in Muscat.

The greater part of each day amongst the close, stifling huts; every evening at the small, Civil hospital near the Residency, who could be more welcome now than the great white Doctor? But, in another month, there would be the same evasion, the same difficulties to be overcome with each new subject for vaccination.

It was strange how, in some small-pox epidemics, the children, with some few exceptions, alone suffered; in others, the adults. At times—although for this it was impossible to assign a good reason—the cases were less malignant, the whole epidemic of a milder

form than at others. Seldom or never had a white man received the contagion from the Arabs, although it was no uncommon thing in the Bazaar to rub against the latter with the disease still fresh upon them.

Outside the cove, the *Dainty* picked up a light land breeze, and made sail. Then, the sun went down, the rattle of the screws ceased, and nothing remained to mar the pleasure of a tropical evening at sea. Coming softly up astern, the breeze overtook and gently fanned the reclining human forms in passing. Dinner was over ; the chairs were comfortable ; not a sound was heard upon the poop, beyond the occasional creak of an ungreased spar, and the constant ripple of the parted water. The very fish forbore to startle with sudden and unexpected jumps ; the audacious flat-fish no longer flopped with prodigious splash within easy biscuit throw ; no more the porpoise leapt the dancing wave ; no more the flying fish skipt from crest to crest. Naught remained to distract man's thoughts from the Creator's boundless firmament and the waters which

are "under the firmament"—naught, save sleep; and as the ship's company was quiet, Morpheus lay enthroned in a variety of cane-bottomed chairs upon the poop; sea gods and goddesses, water-nymphs and sirens, kept their invisible watch and guard around.

The hour was late—9 p.m., at sea! Could the impressionable Tar, in the midst of such majestic surroundings, be also lost in unspeakable admiration, and sleep?

For yet a little while, it almost seemed so. Then, from beyond Jassim the contractor's live stock—the small Arab oxen in the gangways, the fat Arab hens in their close-packed coops—there came a sound which lowing ox and cackling hen would in vain combine to imitate.

The blue-jacket had grown tired of tramping to and fro, with bare feet and folded arms, on a 12-foot plank, and had exhausted once more the favourite topics—his chum's sister, and the peculiarities of the various home railways and their refreshment-rooms. The blue-jacket proposed to amuse himself in

more genial style ; had, in fact, just commenced to do so.

Success crowned his endeavours. The sound of concentrated melancholy, which brought the startled sleepers to their feet, was the result.

But to appreciate the result, hear the events which led up to it.

It had been a day of hard work for Jassim the contractor, and with his distressing chronic malady—upon which we have already lightly touched — somewhat softened by its sole remedy, “bottley beer,” it was little wonder that he had fallen into a slumber of prodigious depth ; his head reclining upon the “Seedie boys’” lockers, both legs thrown carelessly over the quarters of one of the recumbent members of his horned stock.

As he thus lay, wrapt in slumber, an ineffectual attempt on the part of the horned animal to rise, had suggested to the blue-jacket a chance of some genial amusement.

That worthy coxswain, Blunt, heading a goodly band of brothers, rapidly closed upon

the unconscious Jassim from the rear, and with a twist at the tail of the ox, a push under the shoulders of the man, the former struggled to his feet with the latter seated on his back, and triumphantly sustained there by many willing hands.

“Hush—sh! For God’s sake don’t move! First lefftenant’s orders!” murmured Blunt, his tones of friendly anxiety drawing forth a second subdued “Allah!” from the shaking and lop-sided contractor.

“We are—God’s—and unto Him—shall we surely return,” he gasped in strictly religious jerks, his unbroken steed curveting lightly towards the funnel; he himself becoming gradually imbued with the idea that it was after all no terrible nightmare—this vision of hairy men, this feeling of spasmodic motion.

“Allah! Oh, dam!” The fiery ox had reached the funnel casing—was using it as a rubbing post. “Oh, number one, sir! You my good friend! You God’s man! Wallah! He burn my leg. Oh, dam!”

The Arab man's majesty is unbreeched.

But blue-jackets are not to be beaten off by a funnel casing. Ox and man were lifted bodily on high, and carried aft to the quarter deck. Here Blunt called a halt, and addressed the almost stupefied contractor in tones of awful significance : "There ! now you're pretty nigh safe, my joker."

The joker answered not ; but an agonised expression of fear and supplication swept across the contractor's face, telling plainer than words that the contractor doubted.

"You've only got to tip us a stave my 'orse marine," persuasively continued Blunt, applying a finger to the animal's ribs to point the joke, "and we'll let the critter go."

"No, no, my very good friends," implored Jassim, foreseeing far greater misery if left alone. "You not let go ! I never learn to ride the cow !"

"Sing ! First leffttenant's orders," murmured the persuasive Blunt.

"Yarabb ! Oh Lord ! I not savey how you sing, my dear—good—holy Mahomet !"

Blunt, still using his powers of persuasion, had taken a round turn in the animal's tail.

"Sing, will you? Ghost! If there isn't the first leffttenant coming!"

A groan; a great burst of anguish broke from the unfortunate Jassim; and it was at that sound that the poop awakened. The sleepers rushed to the bridge and stood there looking down in wonder at the crowd of blue-jackets, silently, remorselessly, swaying around what appeared to be a dishevelled turban. A turban it was! of colours that would have graced even the "golden prime of the good Haroun al Raschid;" but it now hung disordered in the breeze—all that was visible of Jassim the contractor.

A stern prance of the yet untamed steed, a slight opening in the swaying crowd, and Jassim sat revealed in all the glory of his oxmanship.

Two swarthy legs, over which his cloak flowed loosely, held in close embrace his steed's hindmost quarters. A striped waist-coat, which encased his body, lay extended

along the brute's back, and, projecting from it, two swarthy arms clung with the tenacity of desperation around the brute's short neck. Between the horns there peered a face bearing an expression such as Job's must have worn after his week among the ashes with his three old friends.

Once more the hoarse, whispered command to "sing," the persuasive dig (applied to the man this time), and Jassim, clutching convulsively at his supports, raised his woe-begone face and, in successive spasms (due to the sudden and erratic movements of the ox) burst into doleful song, and sang :

Oh, Su—sannah!
Do not—cry for—me,
I go to—Ala—bama with
My banjo—on my—knee.

Then the contractor paused, looked solemnly around, and gasped for breath. No one heard him. If he had expired at that moment not a finger could have moved.

Then — whether he thought that the shrieks of laughter, which had greeted each

dismal note, demanded an encore, or that in English, as in Eastern ditties, repetition is the great object—certain it is that with increased melancholy and in yet more numerous spasms, he recommenced his exhortation to “Susannah.”

But it wouldn’t do.

“A joke’s a joke; but when it’s like to split a fellow’s ribs it ain’t no jokin’ matter.”

Such being the general feeling, as afterwards expressed by Blunt, the contractor no sooner commenced to repeat his sad determination to “go to Alabama,” than with one crowning yell, the blue-jackets fell back, then fled, rolling heavily. For a brief second, in which Jassim barely found time for a muttered “Bismillah,” man and ox remained immovable. Then the awful dread of the rope’s end of the Ingraisee, again seized the former, and, in despairing accents he returned to his task.

“I go to——”

But it wouldn’t do.

The ox had absolutely no ambition; he

was not musical ; he cared nothing for the projected Alabama expedition. On the contrary, and with a harsh bellow and light bound of freedom, he made for the gangway, Jassim assuming a mixed position upon the quarter-deck.

Even then, the dreaded "fust leffttenant's orders" seemed to follow him. But one misery was overpast ; and his voice—save for the groan that would escape on his contact with the planks—grew lighter and more tuneful as he sat up on his heels, and trolled forth once more "Oh, Su—sannah!"

"Stop him, somebody ! Please, stop him. I shall die ; I know I shall !"

It was Edith's voice ; but so strained and broken that it scarcely reached the caroller's ears. Fortunately for the continuation of the story it did just reach, and Jassim, understanding it to imply that the music might cease, gratefully closed his mouth, allowed his features to regain their normal condition of serenity, and gravely erecting himself, salaamed profoundly, withdrew to the oxen,

and, in something under two minutes, he was fast asleep in his previous position, and with his old companion.

Upon the bridge, the late audience slowly recovered. Norris felt half inclined to be angry ; but after all a blue-jacket will “show off” before a lady as readily as school-girls—or, for the matter of that, more elderly maidens—will grow prettily playful and skittish on the approach of a possible admirer.

Besides, he had laughed—had indeed suffered more severely than had poor Edith. So there was no help for it ; the desecration of the quarter-deck must be overlooked for this once, the ladies being—as surely, by this time they should have grown accustomed to being—the excuse.

“ But won’t some of the men sing properly, Captain Norris ? I do so dearly love their pretty songs—their sailor songs ! ” and Mrs. Elton looked a little conscious look at Norris.

“ Yes, mayn’t we have a ‘ good old fore-bitter,’ as Ernie calls it,” exclaimed Edith.

“ My dear child ! ”

Mrs. Elton's shocked exclamation was beautiful to hear; her shocked glance towards Captain Norris was beautiful to see—if he had but seen it. But Captain Norris was not shocked.

Mr. Elton, who had roused himself just in time to hear the concluding notes of Jassim's dirge, and to inquire why that fellow was making an ass of himself—eh? now interposed with a suggestion that as dear Julia was very tired, and delicate, she had better have her light "night-cap" and go to bed, and—ah—that.

"And what, do you say?" snapped the tired Julia.

"Bed time, dear!" said the Political Agent airily. "But never mind, my love," he added softly, edging aft.

"No one wishes to keep you up," remarked his wife. And the Political Agent's long-drawn "Ah!" was scarcely audible as he sank back into his chair, far, far away upon the poop.

“Now for a song!” cried Edith. And Mrs. Elton, who had promptly followed her husband’s suggestions—as far as they regarded the light “night-cap”—was understood to echo the sentiment.

“I’ve sent for’ard to ask if one of the men will strike up,” said the Commander. “But blue-jackets’ songs are not always good old fore-bitters, I’m afraid, Edith. The old sea songs are dying out; they’d sing a hymn now, if there was a long chorus to it.”

“Good gracious! I hope they won’t!—I mean—we can hear those in any church, you know,” observed Mrs. Elton. “I want to hear a regular blue-jacket’s song. And I—think—I shall go to bed.”

She did not go to bed; but she gently fell asleep, which was much the same thing to her. She was very delicate, her husband said, and very tired.

“‘The anchor’s weighed,’ or ‘The white squall,’” suggested Edith hurriedly, after a glance at Mrs. Elton. “Those are the

sort of songs they always sing, are they not?"

"Not always," said Norris, rather sadly. He was fond of a good sea song himself; could sing one if put to it.

"There's someone tuning up now!" exclaimed Edith.

"Ye-ess," said Norris, very sadly. He recognised the tune.

Then came silence. Then Edith said feebly, "Good gracious!" and a man's shrill, cockney voice piped mournfully on the still night air. And this was the opening chorus of the "good old sea song" it sang.

"Down by my old cabin door-or-or,
There lies my sister and my brother;
There lies my wife, the pride of my life,
And the che-ild in the grave by its mother."

"And they'll tell you that the British sea-man has not degenerated!" murmured that hard-hearted Norris. He was fond of the Navy.

However, there were still some men who

could sing of better things than private family graveyards ; and after Edith had heard Blunt's soundings, "by the deep, nine," she went to bed happy.

Norris too, felt brighter then.

CHAPTER V.

THAT night Doctor Dogherty, in a flowing gown of camel's hair of Arab manufacture, and with no other company than the ordinary cockroach of small craft proclivities, gambolling undisturbed amongst its folds, sat upon a camp-stool before the table. It was only a flat board which covered his wash-hand basin ; but, no matter, he sat it in his cabin, and by the light of an English "dip," the primitive oil and floating wick of his friends the Arabs having been given up as somewhat unsavoury, pondered carefully over the events of the past day ere committing them to writing in the Journal. Events had been scarce of late, and the Doctor pondered long, and his face was

sad and careworn as his glance fell, and rested upon the busy cockroach.

No comfort there; no pabulum for the Journal there. The manners and customs of the domestic blackbeetle or cockroach had already supplied it with much matter, and had long ago been forwarded home, together with other important extracts, to the long-suffering "future wife."

It was a happy thought that had prompted him to write an account of Jassim's singing; now a yet happier one supplied the description of the worthy Contractor, which followed. "His speech," ran the flowing pen, "is slow, weighty, and concise; he is seldom provoked to laughter; his only gesture is that of stroking his beard, the venerable symbol of manhood, and the sense of his own importance teaches him to accost his equals without levity and his superiors without awe. Such a man," concluded the Doctor, "is Jassim, the Contractor," and therefore, "such a man" we must believe the Doctor actually thought him to be.

He did not mention in the Journal that

the above description was taken word for word from "Gibbon's Rise and Fall of the Saracen Empire," and was applied by that author to the whole of the Arab nation.

When the supply of passing events does not quite satisfy his demand, the private journalist is not particular in his hunt for matter.

Then the temperature was duly entered 89 degrees; and the Doctor blew out the light, left the cockroaches to darkness and candle ends, and wearily climbed the ladder to his mat on the poop.

In five minutes he slept, in ten he snored, but not for long.

"Doctor Dogherty! Doctor Dogherty!"

The Doctor moved uneasily, but only to stroke his beard, "the venerable symbol of manhood," not because he could call to mind having seen his friend the Arab do so, but because in his dreams he remembered that Gibbon had said he did.

"Doctor Dogherty! Come, sir, you're wanted; one o' them Seedie boys is ill!"

The hand which stroked the Doctor's beard was gently shaken by Blunt, who was Quartermaster of the watch ; and Blunt's voice whispered again, gently as the rushing wind : "That's you, sir ; you're awake right enough."

But the Doctor was as yet only gradually returning from amongst Gibbon's Arabs, and his speech was "slow, weighty, and concise," as he muttered fervently : "Grand, simple faith—Inshallah ! It is his destiny."

Blunt dropped the Doctor's arm, and his face wore a puzzled, almost grieved, look. "That's a bit hard on him, ain't it, sir ?" and an undergrowl of Blunt's indignation well-nigh struggled through Blunt's respect. "So you ain't comin', sir ?" he added, as Dogherty, still loath to leave the good old Saracens, rolled over on his side. "You ain't comin' !" and it was Blunt's grief that spake now—"not comin'!"

"No fear can shake the true believer," murmured the Doctor ; "death has no sting for him."

"Well, I'm—blessed," cried Blunt in utter

astonishment, and with as much respect as that worthy coxswain could bring himself to show a would-be murderer, for surely a doctor who refused to visit a dying man was nothing less. "No sting? With the poor wretch a' grippin' and tearin' himself like a madman on the flying deck. Well, I'm—d——d!"

He paused a moment, then stepped back a pace, and muttered thoughtfully: "Becos he's black, I suppose. Well, if 'twere fever he'd got, maybe I could doctor him myself, or if 'twere dysentery, 'tis strange if I couldn't ease him a bit, for I've been handled by both those beauties; but 'tis one o' those sudden Eastern diseases. Anyhow, a tot of navy rum can't hurt, whether 'tis fever or dysentery, or both."

Blunt stepped back another pace and touched his cap with grim deference; his faith in his Officers had been rudely shaken, but it wasn't for the likes of him to say so.

"Good-night, sir," said he; "no offence, sir. We can easily ship another Seedie boy when Ropeyarn's dead."

“Eh? What’s that?” cried Dogherty, returning with a start from Mahomet and his four “rightly guided” successors.

Blunt answered rather sulkily, for what was the use of going over the ground again? “Well, sir, you said he was a true believer and wouldn’t mind dying, and I made free to mention that there’s plenty more boys where Ropeyarn came from. Good-night, sir.”

“Good-night, ye fool!” roared Dogherty, breaking into Irish. “What d’ye mane? Ye cry out that a man’s dying, and wid that ye say ‘Good-night, sor!’ Be gor, ye’re dhrunk!”

“Well,” gasped Blunt, “I am d——d! Lord forgive me—and him,” he piously added; but aloud he only said: “No, sir; not drunk, sir. This way, sir, please,” and led the Doctor to the flying deck.

There half-a-dozen black faces peered into the Doctor’s, and Sam Crowe touched his arm and guided him to where fever, or dysentery, or both, had already done their worst, to the dead body of the Seedie boy, Ropayarn.

The others grouped themselves around as Dogherty looked down silently at the dead man.

That morning the poor fellow had complained of sickness—colic; but it had quickly passed off, and when the evening's agony commenced the Seedie boys had not liked to trouble the Hakim again.

Sam Crowe looked wistfully into Dogherty's face. No hope there. Then, wonderingly: "He tell me, he think he die to-day."

Dogherty turned quickly at the strange, half-comic tone of awe and sadness; but he said nothing, and stood silently watching Blunt cover the body.

He was thinking of the tale which had been told him only a day or two before in the broken English of the man who now lay dead at his feet. How that he, Ropewarn, and Sam Crowe had been slaves together in Zanzibar, and how they had both tried to escape, he alone succeeding. How he had reached Bandar Abbas, and had at last laid by enough to purchase Sam Crowe's freedom. Then, at the

risk of being recaptured, and the Doctor knew what that meant, he had gone back to Zanzibar and had given the money to his friend and fellow slave. Together they had reached the Seedie boys' haven—Mattrah, and together they had joined one of the English gun-vessels, receiving then their Christian names, "Ropeyarn" and "Sam Crowe."

Now Ropeyarn lay dead, and Sam Crowe could only touch the Doctor's arm, and shake his head sadly, as he repeated in awe-stricken tones: "He tell me, he think he die to-day."

Dogherty watched the black head, close shaven save for one little tuft of wool at the crown, which would have gone far to ensure its owner's engagement as a "corner man" to Messrs. Moore and Burgess, but which was grown for a very different reason by Sam Crowe; who, being a married man, but as yet having no family, had sworn on oath that he would not shave that spot until he had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, walked his seven times around the caaba, kissed his seven times the "black stone," run his seven times

between the two sacred hills, and thrown his seven stones to mark Abraham's discomfiture of the devil in the valley of Mina. Having done which and kept his oath, he was fully persuaded that he should be rewarded, and his wife no longer a reproach.

Only a black head with close shaven crown of comic shape ! A black face with a mouth like a Christy Minstrel's ! An ugly, dirty face, with the gleam of a pair of black bloodshot eyes, the glitter of a mouth full of great white teeth, a face to shrink from at dusk, to jeer at by daylight, it was so ugly, yet so comical withal. How could sympathy go forth to a misshapen nigger ? What could there be in a grinning, tear-stained face, a wild awe-stricken look, to deserve aught from the white man but laughter ?

God knows ! It was very funny ; but as Sam Crowe crouched down upon the planks beside the Union Jack and touched it reverently, and murmured again, " He tell me, he think he die to-day," there was something in the ugly face, something

in the uncouth, clown-like voice and superstitious words that made the white men turn quickly and leave the deck in silence.

Perhaps it was the utter absurdity of a sorrowful, blubbering black man ! Perhaps they were afraid of laughing ! Goodness knows !

“Poor devil !” muttered Blunt. Whatever he may have thought about the Doctor’s laziness, or worse, and Blunt had queer fancies, he would not be the one to say “too late” now ; not if it was to double his pension.

Needless to say, Dogherty’s conscience was easy. “Colic first ; finally the heart,” he reported to the Commander. Then he went below, and put it in the journal. And there was nothing funny in what he wrote.

At daylight next morning, the high cliffs to the westward of Jask were visible, and towards noon, Jask itself was in sight, or would have been but for the thick sand-storm which entirely hid that desert Telegraph station, and threw off a fine sprinkling to

try the temper and eyes, and titillate the nostrils of the distant seafarer.

Well! It was chance; and ladies are fickle! So Mrs. Elton and Edith did not murmur, but sat on deck, since the heat had driven them from below, and talked to Aboul Mirza, while the Officers grumbled at desert luxuries.

It was a wild notion; but young ladies have those sort of things, and Edith sat upright in her chair, and in grave tones proceeded to try the effect of a little serious talk upon the Interpreter.

“He’s fond of the English,” thought she, “and much too sensible, and, good-looking, to believe in that stupid old Prophet. Who knows? Perhaps——” But here she lost herself in the maze of religious argument; and the possible convert perched himself with a pleasant smile at her feet, prepared to be affable.

He rather admired the pretty English girl, with the cheeks red as the cámalatá, white as the water lily. He would try to forget

for a few moments the inferiority of her sex?

“Now, Aboul, I want to talk to you seriously,” commenced Edith. And the pious Moslem’s face assumed an aspect of awful sanctity as he twisted his beads, and murmured “Inshalláh!” and patiently awaited his doom.

He would humour the pretty, unmarried miss! She was “khoub-i-dukhtarah.” Strange that no husband had paid for her yet!

“Now, Aboul, listen! you are not leading a good life, I’m afraid.”

The Interpreter shook his head sadly, and his beads flew apace. “The two angels who keep the books, they know it,” said he. “The book Sejjin for my bad jobs is full up, I know it. And the other book Illiyún has no writing, all same, nothing.”

Edith regarded him with awakening compassion, but continued severely, “You had four wives before, yet they tell me you have just married another at Muscat.”

“No, no,” cried Aboul, eagerly. “Only

four women still ! I send away one. I good Mahomedan myself, and give her three chances, not like Englishman, who, when once he say, 'go away' never take her back again. I give her three chances like proper Mahomedan. She no good. Then, I send her back to her old mother, and marry other woman."

Mrs. Elton laughed heartily ; whereupon the Interpreter looked angry, and Edith, feeling that at any moment she might be involved in an argument concerning the laws of divorce in England and Persia, dropped the dangerous, but surely most natural subject of matrimony, and proceeded with more caution.

After all, there is nothing like beginning at the beginning ; so, turning her back upon Mrs. Elton, who would "giggle like a mad woman," she started boldly, and, as she fondly believed, safely, with : "Who made man, Aboul ? Now, think quietly."

"La-il-l-Allah !" cried Aboul excitedly. "How's that I think quietly ? Who made me ? I tell you."

And Edith listened bewildered, as he forthwith broke into a weird tale of Islam.

“ You know that Allah, you call ‘ God ? ’ ” and the interpreter touched his forehead, whilst Edith nodded helplessly.

Somehow she seemed to have dropped into the wrong position.

“ Never mind ; I tell you,” continued Aboul, with kindly patronage. “ Long time ago—perhaps hundred, perhaps thousand—I not know how many years ago, God called Jíbrail, the number one angel that Mahomet saw standing by the lote-tree, which no one can pass, and he sent him down to the sea-shore, and tell him : ‘ You bring me that mud.’ But the mud said, ‘ For God’s sake, don’t you take me, Jíbrail.’ So he didn’t take him. Then God was vexed, and he sent Mikayil, the friend of those Jew men, and Israfil, who will sound the last bugle, to get that mud. But the mud, he pray and pray both those peoples : ‘ For God’s sake, don’t you take me.’ And they didn’t take him. Then God was more fiercely vexed, and He swear : ‘ By the

fig and the olive, I will have that mud !' So he sent Azrael ; and the mud said, ' For God's sake, don't you touch me, Azrael.' But Azrael stop up his ears, and make hard his heart, and say : ' God, He order me.' So he took the mud. Then God tell him to take it to an old Deeb, who was praying behind a big hill, eight hundred years' journey off, and when that old Deeb had finished to pray, to give him God's salaam—you call complements—and tell him to make it into man. Then, after long time—suppose ten minutes ; suppose two years, you like—the old Deeb, he make man ; and Azrael bring him to God, and God say he was good, and God tell Azrael : ' Because you bring the mud to make man, I give you, yourself only, order to take the life from the man, and make him dead. There ! ' concluded Aboul triumphantly. "Now you know who make the man."

" And a very pretty story too," laughed Mrs. Elton. " You will learn a thing or two yet, Edith."

Edith looked perplexed ; she did not

appear to be getting on, and Aboul Mirza was patiently awaiting further questioning. He liked explaining matters to the young girl, but had no desire to be laughed at by "that old wife."

Edith tried a fresh start.

"You have heard of Satan, have you not, Aboul?"

To her unspeakable comfort, the interpreter shook his head. Here was a chance. She, so to speak, elbowed her knees, and took it.

"And is it possible that you can tell me nothing about Satan, the Evil One?"

"Ai-yah! Him?" cried Aboul. "Shaithàn, you mean; you want to know 'bout Shaithàn? Well, his first name Azazaël, one great angel; and when God had made man, He tell all the angels: 'You salaam to that man.' But Azazaël said, "How's that I make salaam? No; I big swell; I proper angel. I made of fire, and that man made of clay; I not make salaam.' Then God say: 'You, Shaithàn; you, Eblis;' and He sent him

away to live with the despised, in the far away, the hell. Now you know just as much as I myself do. These things all true that I tell you. Jew and Soonee Mahomedan tell lies—always tell lies; but Shia man speak true."

"I'm afraid you do not regard your fellow-men in a proper Christian spirit," said Edith, seeing another opportunity to enter.

"No; I not Christian," replied Aboul, with prompt decision. "I make pilgrimage to Mecca directly I save 10,000 rupees; always I stop and pray when the priest sings the call to prayer; always I give one-tenth my pay to the poorie men; never I go to see one other man's wife when that other man away in bazaar; never I get drunk, and kick up bobbery. No; I not Christian," and with nimble fingers telling his amber beads, he praised Allah and the Prophet that it was so.

"Bravo, Aboul Mirza! Bravo!" cried Mrs. Elton, laughing loudly. "Don't go away, Edith. He'll make a Mussulwoman of you yet! Ha! ha! Did you hear that, George?"

But Edith had quietly joined Mr. Elton ; and Mr. Elton himself, having taken up a good position for catching the very first glimpse of Jask, had unfortunately fallen asleep just before the sand-storm cleared away. So Mrs. Elton turned her attention to the Interpreter ; glad that chance had left them together.

We have followed her thoughts once as a daring wish fathered them. Since then they have been constantly busy. Always on the same subject ; always with the same result.

We know their drift : we know the wish that prompted them. The very worst of women is not perpetually muttering strange threats, and otherwise tragically demeaning herself. But none the less surely will the dark thought, the desperate resolve, be present with her, let her dissemble as she may.

Mrs. Elton, with all her frothiness, could dissemble still ! At eventide, as the sun's declining rays and the effervescent drinks descended, her love for the Commander might, as we know, rise too boldly to the surface.

But never in the most bewitching hours of dark, the most effervescent moments of the "necessary stimulant," had word or sign arisen, that might hint at the thoughts which burned most deeply then, first implanted, as they had since been nourished, by "Whiskey and Soda."

Aboul Mirza—native of a land in which, as Mrs. Elton had heard, or read, or dreamt, there is not a truthful man, not a virtuous woman—was to be propitiated. And what could be easier? What would he not do for her, the Consul's wife? and for the shapely Kraun?

"But not whilst I am near and have to watch," she thought; "better chances will come; and then, when I am free, Jask will remember the old days!"

So the Political Agent slumbered on, dreaming of his delicate Julia; whilst she carefully prepared the way for better chances, and, for Jask.

"I did not know that you had married again," said she, turning smilingly towards

Aboul. "How old is your present number four?"

"Fifteen, she think," replied the Interpreter. And he volunteered no further information.

"And very nice of course! Eh, Aboul?"

Then, the newly married enthusiast could no longer be reticent. "Nice? ah! you know that Persian song? 'Sweeter than sweet! Newer than new!' That's Zuleika. Ah! and she's only fifteen! I pay her father four hundred rupees for her. The Jew!"

"That seems a very great deal of money! More than thirty pounds," said Mrs. Elton, musingly.

Aboul pricked his ears. "You like! you very good," he murmured. "I have not given that father all the moneys yet."

Mrs. Elton was still reflecting.

"Poor fellow!" she muttered in a thoughtful undertone, which the Interpreter quite appreciated. "I suppose," she continued, speaking cheerfully, "that it's not too late to make the fair Zuleika a wedding present? Zuleika! What a pretty name! I hope she is

as handsome, but not quite so—a—indiscriminating as her namesake, Madame Potiphar, of whom you may have read in the Koran. For Josephs are rare, Aboul ; even rarer than poor dear Potiphar, and most likely his wife, poor thing, thought." And Mrs. Elton blew a little sigh. But whether of sorrow for "poor dear Potiphar," or of sympathy with that poor thing, his wife, in her unfortunate selection, was unknown to Aboul, who had not enjoyed our opportunities of following the lady's train of thought.

He looked very grave, however, and Mrs. Elton hastened to add: "Now, about the present, Aboul ! Would your wife accept this ring as a wedding gift ?"

The Interpreter struck an attitude of wondering admiration at the beauty of the diamonds, because he thought that he ought; but a pearl or turquoise would have been much more to the Persian taste.

"And we must see what we can do about that thirty pounds," continued Mrs. Elton

graciously. "It's a large sum to give for one wife ! Eh, Aboul ?"

She tripped away, with ever ready smile, to her spouse, and awakened that anxious look-out man with a kiss. For she felt happy. The Interpreter was hers, she thought—body and soul.

For a moment or two Aboul stood looking thoughtfully at the ring. Then placed it on his little finger.

"Worth 'bout forty rupees," he muttered contemptuously, "not much good. I think that Consul's wife take littley drinks again. Never mind ! More drinks, more backsheesh."

He swaggered carelessly forward, but muttered as he went: "What's that she says 'bout Zuleika ?—my wife not like the king Kitfer's wife. Bad old woman, that Consul's wife."

Evidently the Interpreter retained possession of his own body and soul.

But the row of telegraph buildings is in sight at the point. Near it, the huts of its small

dependent village ; the barrack of its small Sepoy guard. And, along the shore, as far as the eye can reach, sand, nothing but sand, and a solitary Banyan tree—perhaps two.

At anchor off the village lies H.M. gun-vessel *Buoyant*, under orders for England ; already homeward bound. The blue-jackets cluster round the forecastle to try and recognise an old chum as the *Dainty* steams on to pick up a billet closer in shore. On the poop, the Officers' glasses are all turned towards their lucky sister ship.

Homeward bound ! One need serve in the Persian Gulf, on the west coast of Africa, to know all that the words mean.

It is not so much the intense longing for home ! That perhaps passed away with the first year of the commission ; and now, so that home be at the journey's end, a month more or less on the way seems of but little consequence to the traveller. Home, with the brothers and sisters laughing at the gate, the father and mother laughing—well, God knows ! there may be tears too—in the hall, is but a recol-

lection of the last welcome, a dream of the next, which seems still far away.

But what of the present? It is a long "good-bye" to an existence which has been at its best monotony, to many misery. Good-bye—I speak of the Persian Gulf—to swagger in tatters, to filth in high repute, to Mahomet's swarthy Arab crew, for whom the past lies buried, together with its prophets and caliphs, for whom the future is unchangeable, the present unheeded. Good-bye, not a regret for the places left behind; happy, if only they may see them, smell them no more.

Homeward bound. There is life in the mere words; and officers and men in the *Dainty* feel something of their meaning as they try to look without envy at the *Buoyant's* long pennant.

Homeward bound. Well, their time must come. A few more touches of fever, a few more sand-storms, dead calms, and hot winds; a few more multitudes of flies and mosquitoes, and—

"Ain't those fellers happy now?" solilo-

quised Blunt at the con, and his eyes wandered away to that long, streaming pennant. "Ay ! 'appy as nobs in the boxes, whilst here are we, up in the—— Eh ? Port ! Darn your eyes, youngster—port ! Mind yer wheel, or I'll twist your lug for ye. Port ! Hard-a'-port ! D——n this here Persian Gulf ! "

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was plenty of ship-visiting that evening amongst both officers and men, for the *Dainty* and *Buoyant* had not met for some months; and early next morning Jassim and his live stock were sent on shore, the Contractor being evidently highly delighted to get away, as for aught he could tell to the contrary, it might have been pre-ordained that he should have yet another ride, sing yet another song on ship-board. As for the animals, they would probably have preferred completing their short term of existence in the *Dainty*, to being dragged hither and thither in boats, with sudden death to follow. However small the ox, he cannot enjoy being hoisted by his horns.

With the live stock went also the Seedie boys, taking with them on a grating covered with the Union Jack, the body of their late messmate—Ropeyarn.

It would be easy to dig a hole in the sand; and what did they want of a priest?

They soon came back, and in the evening the “tum-tum” of their one-stringed banjos was loud as ever.

Most likely they felt that the Moslems’ three days of crying might be objected to on board ship, and so they strummed their banjos and reserved their Mahomedan emotions.

Sam Crowe alone held aloof, sitting helplessly on the locker, which a day before Ropeyarn had shared with him, and never noticing the monotonous chant of his happy, but unmelodious brethren. He looked uglier and dirtier than ever, and he did little but shake his big head wonderingly, and murmur : “Máshalláh ! máshalláh !”

“God has willed !” That was all his religion, all that he had learnt, or even hoped to learn of Islam ; and he seemed to reap little

enough comfort from it, for now and again he turned towards his and Ropewayarn's locker, and often as he did so he'd droop his head, and murmur sadly : " Me wash 'um, me scrub 'um —alone."

A light shumahl—the northerly wind of the Gulf—was blowing pleasantly, and helped to keep up Jask's reputation as the coolest place along the coast in June, not that 95 degrees in the shade is exactly cool ; but as Dogherty remarked in his Journal : " One can't expect to have everything." He—Dogherty—also made a similar remark to Carson, who sat at the table in his jersey, fanning himself, and trying to keep the flies off with a pair of parallel rulers.

It seemed, however, that Carson had not heard Dogherty's remark, for he avoided the Doctor's inquiring gaze, and the rulers remained at rest amongst the slain, whilst he murmured—as it might have been a prayer—" and there was no more sea."

" Faith ! and didn't I say so ? " chimed in the eager Hakim. " If ye'd only heard when

ye weren't listening but now, ye'd have known it ! One can't expect—— Ah ! ye would, would ye ?”

Apparently Carson “would” very much ; and the Doctor, finding those parallel rulers the most insinuating he had ever encountered, finished his sentence on the upper deck ; Carson, after a short interval, retiring to his cabin to bathe his head in rum and milk, for he was full-blooded, and lived in constant dread of apoplexy.

“Can't—expect—everything ?” he blurred out in fierce tones, whilst the rum soaked greedily in. “I know—well—one thing. If I owned the two properties, I'd sell Jask and live—well, dash it !—down below.” And he cursed the thirst for knowledge which had prompted him to read Marryat's novels during school hours, the simplicity which had led him to believe them ; and his eye wandered mechanically towards the text, holding a prominent position over his looking-glass—“and there was no more sea.”

But, by a merciful dispensation of Provi-

dence, even flies have their hours of rest; and from the time of their retirement at sunset to the moment, not long deferred, when the voracity of the mosquito seeks satisfaction, mankind may sit still, perchance with temper unruffled.

The *Buoyants* were to give a farewell picnic in the evening, so at four o'clock all who were going from the *Dainty* came on deck, prepared for a start; Mr. Elton and the ladies intending to remain on shore as guests of the chief of the telegraph department.

Mrs. Elton was in high spirits, and her devoted husband proportionately happy.

She was smilingly mounting the ladder, when suddenly she started back. "Gracious goodness! what's that?" she cried faintly. A black figure darted by her, up the side; stared wildly around, and then rushed forward and crept away beneath the head gratings, followed by the ship's pets—a couple of dogs, a gazelle, and a cat or two.

What was it indeed? They were not kept

long in doubt. The creature was soon brought to light again, and gently "persuaded" towards the quarter-deck.

"Fugitive slave, by all that's confusing!" muttered the Paymaster; "and if we are fools enough to keep him, I shall spend the remainder of the commission in copying correspondence."

"What on earth are we to do with him?" said the Commander helplessly. He was not often at a loss on service questions; but—a fugitive slave! Lord! If it ever got wind that a black brother had appealed to him for succour in vain, Exeter Hall would make England too hot for him. If, on the other hand, he was guided simply and unpolitically by considerations of humanity, and kept a friendly Arab Sheikh's domestic slave, he would be in the pleasant position of a naval officer who commits "a breach of international comity and good faith."

Norris was by no means a hard-hearted man; but he looked with aversion at that black conundrum.

The poor wretch himself seemed only anxious to wriggle away under a gun slide, and be forgotten. His was a low type of East African beauty, and would have blushed unseen anywhere.

“How lucky that the poor fellow reached the ship safely!” said Edith; all the compassion which we, the monstrosities, excite in the female breast, kindling in her glance as she turned pityingly towards the poor black man, who didn’t seem to like it.

The Commander looked perplexed.

“The wretches have been flogging him too!” cried Edith. “See the marks on his shoulders!”

The Commander looked more perplexed.

“I don’t wish to do anyone an injustice,” remarked Carson, in tones of conscientious thoughtfulness; “but perhaps he—well, dash it!—deserved it! Eh?”

Edith regarded the Lieutenant with positive horror. But all unconcernedly, he added, “speaking from experience, my own experience—they often do.”

“ So do you, I daresay,” cried Edith, with great asperity, and some brusqueness.

“ Possibly. Well, dash it!—possibly,” calmly asserted Carson. “ It’s all imagination, you only have to imagine that we all do.”

“ If imagination’s everything, I wonder you don’t imagine that you like the sea,” said Edith sharply.

“ And lose my pet growl? I wouldn’t do myself the injustice. I’ll imagine that I liked the sea after I’ve retired.”

“ Better leave him alone, Edith,” interposed the Commander. “ We shall be late if we waste much more time here. We can take our friend on shore in the cutter, for it won’t do to receive him on board, unless we are prepared to stick to him, and I’ll put him under Smythe’s care until we can find his master. How will that do, Elton? ”

The Political Agent, in reply, expressed an opinion that there seemed to be plenty of room in the cutter, and that Smythe was a capital fellow; but the Political Agent did not for a moment admit the existence of that

fugitive slave; and any other diplomatic remarks that he might have committed himself to were cut short by his wife, who chirruped softly, "a most perfect arrangement, I'm sure;" pushed him towards the ladder, and tripped lightly over the side after him.

Edith waited for a moment before following, and looked at the Commander: "You cannot mean to send him back, Captain Norris?"

Norris looked guilty. "Perhaps I may think with Carson, that he has been punished deservedly—for crime. Besides, I cannot interfere with 'domestic slaves,' as they call them."

"Camel drivers to some old tyrant of an Arab!" cried Edith, scornfully. "But promise me that you won't send him back. Will you? Think of 'Uncle Tom' and that horrid 'Legree.'"

"I promise you, Edith. He shall not go back," said Norris, decidedly. But whatever other thought may have influenced his decision,

Uncle Tom and Legree were certainly not in it.

“Thank you. I knew you would. Will it be very difficult to manage ?” she asked anxiously.

“No, no. I wish there might be difficulty, that I might—a—manage it,” said he, commencing his sentence quickly and ending in partial collapse, as he remembered—seldom that he forgot—that she was engaged to Daymon.

“Where is Captain Jack Norris ? All waiting for Captain Jack Norris !” called Mrs. Elton from the boat, and not for months had Norris found her voice so welcome. How Edith must have despised him had he dared speak words of love to her. And they had so nearly escaped him.

“I’m afraid we shall catch it from Julia,” said he hurriedly.

“Julia ?” echoed Edith, in a surprised whisper.

And there was no time for him to try and

explain. Luckily, the fair lady in question retained her high spirits.

"Come, you two young ones," said she gaily; "you ought to be the first in the boat. Edith, do put your veil down, dear. You'll get as brown as a Beloochee, won't she, Mr. Daymon? And, Captain Norris! please make your Interpreter ask that unfortunate black thing not to try and burrow through the bottom of the boat. One would think that he was afraid of white women. Curious person!"

"When ye reflect," observed Dogherty, "that an Irish or English lady's face must be rare to him as—to use their own expression—'a white spot in a black camel's skin,' dazzling as the beauty which Mokanna's followers in the ancient times believed to be hidden behind his veil of silver gauze. When ye reflect—"

"Perhaps you never heard of a—what they call—juftak?" casually inquired Carson, addressing himself more particularly to Mrs. Elton. And receiving no reply beyond an infuriated growl from the interrupted Dogherty,

he continued : " I read the other day that a juftak, a bird of Dogherty's 'ancient times,' had one wing, the male bird having a hook on the opposite side, the female a ring, so that when they flew together they—well, d'ye see, hooked it—you may have heard the expression in our own times. But I interrupt your, what ye call, ancient reflections, Dogherty."

" Ye always do ! " grumbled the Doctor. " What I was trying to say was, that when ye reflect that until to-day that unfortunate negro had only heard of the moon-faced woman's wondrous beauty from eastern fables ! When ye reflect——"

" Possibly you never heard the eastern fable about Solomon ? " casually inquired Carson, turning with much interest towards Edith. " Someone says that Solomon had a carpet of green silk of great length and width, sufficient for all his people to drink their afternoon tea upon ; and when they were all seated the wind by his orders took up the carpet and carried it wherever he pleased, an army of birds flying overhead to form a canopy

to shade them from the sun. That's a, what they call, 'eastern fable.' Capital idea, the sun-shade—eh? But I interrupt you, Dogherty," he broke off, with much concern.

"Ye always do," growled the Doctor.

"And just as he was going to make a pretty speech to the moon-faced ladies!" said Mrs. Elton. "It's very seldom we get a compliment from Dr. Dogherty."

"Yes," murmured Dogherty, with his charming Irish bluntness. "But I was thinking of me future wife then."

After this, and at Carson's special request, Mrs. Elton consented to consider herself sat upon.

Thus prattling on, the party reached as near the shore as the shelving beach would permit, and were then carried through the shallow water to where all Jask and the *Buoyants* were waiting for them.

Smythe, the Superintendent, was there upon his camel, looking quite the traveller. Mrs. S., and the Assistant-Superintendent's lady, slung in panniers on either side of the

only other camel the station owned, were there also. And at that dizzy height, and seated back to back, the usual wifely feud between Mrs. Superintendent and Mrs. Assistant ditto was tacitly permitted to lapse.

A curious assortment of donkeys, having upon their backs the wonderfully draped figures of men for whom fashion is not, gavotted around the central objects.

In rear, a string of like animals, laden with food, wound along the sandy track beneath the telegraph wires, on their way to the Banyan tree, gleaming greenly over the well in the distance.

A few stragglers, who were evidently not built for riding, had taken advantage of the short halt to quit their unaccustomed seats, and wander down to the sea-shore to hunt for shells. These, however, were soon brought in by the gallant Commander of the *Buoyant*, who, mounted upon a piebald ass, pointed out to them that, far from being an unattainable or even an uncommon excitement for Jask, hunting for shells was one in which they could

indulge at any time and over any extent of country, with but slight danger of interruption. But a picnic!—and a picnic with four ladies, and one of those ladies unmarried!

END OF VOL. I.

